

*The  
Nut  
Cracker*

*Frederic  
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THE NUT CRACKER

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"It will be necessary to bore through the bone"

# The Nut Cracker

*By*

FREDERIC S. ISHAM

*Author of*

Nothing but the Truth, Three Live Ghosts

Aladdin from Broadway, This Way Out

Half a Chance, Under the Rose

etc.

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STOCKTON MULFORD



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THE NUT CRACKER

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# THE NUT CRACKER

## CHAPTER I

**M**R. HORATIO SLIPAWAY was worried. Now there are various and different kinds of worries. There are the worries of the heart, of the mind and of the purse. There are worries great, and worries small. There are worries real and worries imaginary. Mr. Slipaway's worries partook of all varieties and kinds. They were of every shade and complexion. And as every worry breeds another, so ten breeds ten until a few original worries become an ever growing host. The time had arrived when Mr. Slipaway's worries seemed, to that unfortunate gentleman, like unto a mighty Lilliputian army attacking him (Slipaway) with javelin, sword, pincers, hammer, tongs or any other weapon calculated to pinch, pain or annoy. Mr. Slipaway mentally writhed; outwardly a rather forced smile played upon his naturally optimistic features.

Mr. Slipaway was about thirty-five, and ordina-

rily would have drifted through life's troubled sea with a smile and a twinkle of the eye, but events had shorn him of the twinkle, and the smile, as aforesaid, was more furtive, artificial and manufactured than would have been the case had it sprung from the erstwhile halcyon depths of Mr. Slipaway's true sunny soul. Coming events cast their shadows before.

The shadows traveling as harbingers of events which were in pursuit of Mr. Slipaway were of Stygian hue; there didn't seem to be a single silver lining to the clouds that cast them. Mr. Slipaway shuddered when he thought of the outcome. But Johnnie Briggs grinned. Johnnie, as a constant student of Horatio, had his reasons for feeling satisfied. Of course, Johnnie didn't let his old friend see him grin; Johnnie was too diplomatic for that. Good, dear, old, blithe, simple-minded Horatio was in a peck of trouble. This much Johnnie divined by numerous signs and symptoms, before Mr. Slipaway in sheer desperation confided a few of the doleful facts to the seemingly sympathetic ears of Johnnie.

Mr. Slipaway was a bookkeeper in a broker's office in the city; he had made one or two small "investments" on the side that hadn't turned out

very well, but that was only the beginning of Mr. Slipaway's worries. It never rains but it pours. In sheer desperation, Mr. Slipaway breathed some of his dire secrets in Johnnie's ears. Johnnie listened attentively and respectfully; you would have thought Johnnie was awfully sorry, but that was his artfulness. And Horatio was as trusting as Johnnie was artful. How could he fathom the Judas-like depths of Johnnie's soul? How could he delve into the devious and iniquitous motives that swayed the latter's pusillanimous spirit? How could he know that every worry of his (Horatio's) brought a secret chuckle to Johnnie's despicable inner consciousness.

But Horatio was naturally trusting. It was that identical quality that got him into trouble. His mild blue eyes looked out with a kindly light upon a sinful world. His was a whimsical nature; he had danced and made merry, in his day—but that belonged to the past. Now he was a hard-working, fairly sober, married man. Johnnie was a bachelor who held a position somewhat similar to Horatio's, in a neighboring beehive for stocks and bonds. Johnnie was dark and saturnine-looking; Horatio was blond and sanguine. Johnnie's disposition masked depths of cynicism; Horatio had been cursed with buoyant qualities. The former would

be naturally "short" on the market; the latter "long." Not that they were ever real operators, in the sense of the word. Oh, no; they were just two-penny, four-penny clerks. Johnnie was about the same age as Horatio, and once they had had an amatory interest, in common. But that is another story.

"My, I've got troubles," said Horatio, the confiding, to Johnnie who, with consummate guile, had led the other to unbosom himself by slow but sure degrees, late that afternoon, as the two met at a near-by and congenial rendezvous, after the toil and moil of the day's routine was a thing of the past. "I wonder what I ever did to have so many troubles?" And Horatio sighed plaintively.

"You?" said Johnnie. "Why, you've always been a regular saint. You haven't done anything. Why, if I'd ever been one-quarter as good as you, I'd expect to have wings."

"Don't make fun, Johnnie," pleaded Horatio.

"Fun?" said Johnnie indignantly. "I'm not making fun. Believe me!" Earnestly.

"I know," said the other, with a sigh. "We've been old friends too long."

"Of course," said Johnnie, without batting an eyelash. "I should say we have."

"I know. From the time I left the little village," murmured Mr. Slipaway.

"When he left the little village, *he* was shy," hummed Johnnie.

Mr. Slipaway, pausing in lifting a mild beverage to his lips, cast a rather reproachful glance at Johnnie. The words sounded frivolous—too frivolous for such a serious moment.

"Yes, we have been old friends," Johnnie somewhat hastily put in. "Hearts of oak, eh?" And Johnnie took a sip.

Mr. Slipaway muttered something about not feeling like a heart of oak at that particular, precise moment.

"Pooh, pooh! You trust me," said Johnnie. "Haven't we always been friends?"

"There was once a time—?" began Horatio rather shyly.

An instant Johnnie's lips tightened. Then his free-and-easy manner quickly returned.

"Don't know what you're referring to," he said jovially. "Haven't an idea. And if I had, didn't we shake hands?"

"Of course we did," observed Mr. Slipaway, "and I thought that rather fine of you."

"Don't mention it," remarked Johnnie. "I'm happy as a clam as I am," he laughed. "Not a care; not a worry; no one to be responsible for—of course if some one left me a pot of money—but"—Johnnie shrugged—"why worry?"

"That's all very well for you," sighed the other. "But there are occasions—there are circumstances—fearful—terrible—*terrible*—"

He repeated the word with fervent accent; his shoulders drooped; his gaze grew far-away. "And the worst is there is no use trying to drown trouble"—referring to the mild beverage—"or to run away from it. And—and"—his voice faltered—"it's just awful to have to meet it, when it has so many aspects and shapes—you know like those snakes on the head of the Greek woman—I forget who she was—only she carried around about a hundred snakes. Well"—rather incoherently—"I feel as if I might meet that identical woman almost any old time now—"

"Whew," whistled Johnnie. "You seem perfectly sober."

"They aren't those kind of snakes. She only represents woman's wrath—the world's wrath—"

"What's it all about?" said Johnnie. "Say, what's

the use of having a true friend, if you don't confide in him?"

"Believe I will," said Horatio. "Only there are so many angles to my troubles. They are so different, diversified and manifold—"

"Begin just anywhere," observed the other. "I'll trail along."

"That's awfully good of you," observed Horatio gratefully.

"Don't mention it," said Johnnie just as if he meant it.

"It's like this"—began Mr. Slipaway brokenly.

## CHAPTER II

“SOME little bunch of gloom!” commented Johnnie, when Horatio had concluded his tragic narrative.

“But I wasn’t conscious of doing a thing out of the way,” pleaded Mr. Slipaway.

“Do you know what is paved with perfectly good intentions?” said the other severely. “And besides, a jury always believes a woman before a man.”

Mr. Slipaway murmured something miserably about being aware of that pernicious fact.

“Why, she looked so pale and pallid,” he observed, “I was just sorry for her, that is all.”

“All passionate sirens are pale,” said Johnnie, with the air of a connoisseur. “If you had come to me, I could have told you.” Severely. “Why, I’ve known scores of women who’d make trouble for any man, and all of ’em are pale. Red-lipped—dark-haired—red-headed—but *pale*! Why, look at the poets—isn’t it always: ‘passion-pale’—?”

“She only looked hungry, to me,” said Horatio.

“Hungry?” snorted the other. “A typist lady with that complexion and shape—hungry?”

"Shape?" murmured Horatio dolefully. "I only thought of her as—as, well, thin—or *skinny*!"

Johnnie looked at him with positive pity.

"Say, don't you know anything?" he muttered.

"She made eyes at me like she was hungry," insisted Mr. Slipaway. "I guess I'm out of practise."

"I guess you are. When Cleopatra looked at Cæsar, did he think she was hungry?" scoffed Johnnie. "When Helen cast those sheep-eyes at Paris, did he rush off to buy her a ham-sandwich? When Juliet goo-goo eyed at Romeo did he beat it to get her a plate of macaroni? Well, he did not. Those guys understood that wasn't the way the dames were hungry. They knew that passion-pale hunger when they saw it. And so you took the dame to Child's?"

"Frequently," confessed Horatio. "She just looked to me like one of these poor girls that couldn't make enough to live on. How was I to guess that at heart she was one of those Shaw get-a-man-at-any-price sort of women; pursue 'em; grab 'em? If the man belongs to another woman, all the better! Why, I never did more than to pat her hand and to sympathize with her and all poor girls who work for a mere pittance—not enough to keep body and soul together."

"I guess you've been reading O. Henry," growled

Johnnie. "Better stick to Shaw. He understands the sex. Or Kipling. Get that 'Female of the Species' and tack it on the wall, where you can have it constantly before you. And so she says you claimed to be an unmarried man, and so on—etc.? And she is going to sue you, and hale you into court?—And what will you do, when Mrs. Slipaway finds out?" Johnnie eyed the other furtively. "A very charming woman, Mrs. Slipaway," he ruminated. "Charming, but with strong convictions." Mr. Slipaway shifted uneasily. "Religious, too."

"Don't," said Mr. Slipaway hoarsely. "Why tell all those things I already know?"

"I can see her when she finds out," said Johnnie, shaking his head sadly. "Honestly, I'm sorry for you, old man."

"I thought you might be able to help me some—to—to advise me," observed Mr. Slipaway desperately.

"No advice can help you. Better look facts in the face."

"I'm more afraid of looking her in the face," said Mr. Slipaway. "You see, she gages my conduct by that of Number One."

"Her first husband? Yes, she would. He was a masterful man. Very pious; very puritanical;

wouldn't look a woman in the face—especially on Sunday.”

“Think I don't know that?” said Horatio earnestly. “Haven't I always been trying to live up to the proud standard *he* set?”

Johnnie almost smiled; there was a little gleam of satisfaction behind his seeming sympathy. “Well, he went with the widow,” he said softly. Mr. Slipaway looked startled. “That is,” corrected Johnnie, “the memory of him, and what it implies!” Significantly. “Yes; I'm afraid she'll be comparing you with *him*, when she hears about this. I'm not saying it to be mean, Horatio, but as I said before, look facts—”

“There are so many facts,” said Mr. Slipaway. “When I look at one and think how badly I feel, another pops up and makes me feel worse. Debts—breach-of-promise woman—and there's that rich customer—”

“Yes; that's awful,” said Johnnie. “Maybe worse than the dame mix-up! They'll hold you liable, sure.”

“I suppose so,” assented Mr. Slipaway pensively, as if fairly exhausted with worrying. “You see, Johnnie, I had just heard there would be a process-server looking for me on account of her, and I was

so worried I didn't know what I was doing. When I took that telephone message from Mr. Vancourtland, who is one of our richest customers, to buy two thousand shares of steel, I put in the order by mistake on a *sell* ticket. The firm hasn't yet called upon Mr. Vancourtland to settle—"

"But when they do?" said Johnnie sympathetically.

"Why, he's out about fifteen thousand, instead of being in that much, and all on account of me. I'm liable—me—with more debts than cash—domestic trouble brewing, and—and—oh, I wish I was some one else!" Mr. Slipaway exclaimed fervently.

"Well, as long as you won't run away, or commit suicide, why don't you go to one of those swami-chaps, and get him to propel your soul into the infinite? Process-servers, pale, passionate dames and their ilk, would have some job chasing you through the blue empyrean.

"I came to you for comfort, Johnnie. Don't joke," said Mr. Slipaway.

"My words may sound frivolous, but I'm thinking very seriously," said Johnnie. "I'm simply racking my brain. But the situation is so serious—"

"That's it. If I get out of one trouble, another will swamp me."

"Oh, if I were only some one else," repeated Horatio. "I'd like to be anybody except myself—a street-car conductor, a janitor—"

"A multimillionaire?"

"Yes; even that. But what's the use of wishing? Though I did read a story the other day about some one who exchanged places with some one else—how his soul hopped—I forget how—into the body of another man."

"Keep back," said Johnnie. "I don't like the way you're looking at me."

"Oh, that couldn't happen," said Mr. Slipaway resignedly. "But I'll tell you what you could do. Come home with me—to supper. I may need you—you know—that process-server—I have a presentiment we'll find him waiting in front of the house, or something like that. Anyhow, don't desert me, Johnnie."

Mr. Briggs considered; so his dear friend Horatio wished to use him as a kind of buffer to stand by, as it were. Well, there could be no harm in "standing by"; in fact, by so doing Johnnie might find himself considerably edified. Perhaps Mrs. Slipaway could get a divorce—the mills of the gods grind slowly—

"Oh, all right, old chap, I'll go along," said John-

nie generously. "I did have an engagement, but it's all right."

"You're a true friend," observed Horatio with as much gratitude as he was capable of, at the moment.

"Course I am," said Mr. Briggs modestly.

And they got on the car. Mr. Slipaway lived in the suburbs.

### CHAPTER III

MRS. HORATIO SLIPAWAY sat at the little house-organ, playing *Pull for the Shore, Sailor*. It was a favorite "tune" with the good lady, and "awfully consoling." Whenever she felt a bit "down," which was most always, she played *Pull for the Shore*. Sometimes, by way of variety, she indulged in *Where Is My Wandering Boy Tonight?* or some kindred melody of the good old sort. Upon the wall were several "mottoes"—"The Lord Will Provide," "God Bless Our Home," and "No Cross, No Crown."

Mrs. Slipaway would have been a good-looking woman, if she had condescended to study the fashion-plates, but this she would not do, from conscientious scruples. They didn't have fashion-plates in the time of Job and Martha, and why should they have them to-day; they represented a dangerous and pernicious modern influence. So Mrs. Slipaway attired a naturally rather good figure—for a woman of her age—in garments that were certainly not selected to fascinate and inveigle, dangerously, the weaker, masculine sex. No one, by any stretch of

fancy, would have accused her of vampirish designs on man, in general. She had good features, a discontented look, and a careless appearance.

On the wall, a stern, powerfully featured man, abominably done in crayon, gazed down like a guardian saint. It was Mr. Slipaway's predecessor. While Mrs. Slipaway played she could gaze at this coal-black semblance—a striking reminder of the fact that all flesh is dust.

To-day Mrs. Slipaway found her inclinations more indeterminate than usual. She had started to read from the book of Job, but got only as far as where Satan smote the good man with boils from the sole of his feet to the crown of his head, when she lost her place. She picked it up and got to where the two friends came in and wept, when once more her wandering fancies, or half-fancies, led her thoughts into other channels.

Reproaching herself she arose and occupied herself at the house-organ, but not so felicitously as usual. She pulled for the shore, but not with customary vim and vigor; as a rule she was a Grace Darling at the oars; and one felt no apprehensions as to the fate of the little craft she manned—or womaned. But to-day one suffered vague doubts; the little craft seemed at the mercy of the merciless

waves. They reached out like the terrible clutching fingers of the Japanese prints. Mrs. Slipaway got up from the organ; leaving the little craft midway to the shore. For the moment she seemed to forget all about it. Also, she gazed in the general direction of the crayon on the wall and seemed to forget all about him.

She stood in a brown study and even the entrance of their one servant did not arouse her.

"Sure, the butcher's in the kitchen and he wants his money," said the girl.

"Tell him to see Mr. Slipaway," said Mrs. Slipaway absently.

"I have, and 'Much good that will do,' says he."

"We shall trade there no more," said Mrs. Slipaway.

"And the grocer's boy wanted to know when his father would get his?" went on the girl. "He asked me to ask you."

"That will do, Bridget," said Mrs. Slipaway with much dignity. "You will hold no further conversation with these people. The door-bell, Bridget."

Bridget went to the door, leaving Mrs. Slipaway greatly annoyed. For some time, Mr. Slipaway had been very reprehensible in looking after certain little household matters, and when she had called his at-

tention to the fact, he had invariably dismissed the matter with some light or vague excuse. "By jove, he had forgotten—quite slipped his memory"—"Hadn't the butcher been paid yet?"—"Well, that was an oversight"—"It must and should be remedied at once"—But the remedy did not seem to materialize; on the contrary, the situation, instead of improving, became worse. Mrs. Slipaway tapped her foot impatiently. She had a horror of bills. Number One—the saint on the wall—had nearly starved her to death, but he had paid the bills, and she felt it had been a joyous martyrdom. Mr. Slipaway, on the contrary, was an eccentric, but liberal provider. He rejoiced in surrounding her with luxuries of the flesh-pot; no doubt about that. Only he couldn't always pay for them. And latterly, the situation had been growing more acute. From unpaid bills to feminine recriminations, is but a natural step, and for a time life became rather unpleasant at home for that natural optimist, Mr. Horatio Slipaway.

He listened with somewhat of a pathetic smile to Mrs. Slipaway's quite justifiable observations; he felt they were deserved, no doubt, and so did not seek to defend himself. Besides, Mrs. Slipaway always told the truth—he had an enormous respect for her—and so he realized perfectly his own de-

linquencies and numerous short-comings. He even spoke blithely of the butcher and the baker and candlestick-maker—but those gentlemen simply would *not* be made light of. How different was their conduct now than it had been when they had solicited Mr. Slipaway's trade; then, his rather generous manner of ordering had filled them with delight. Mr. Slipaway had seemed a prince; now he was a pariah. As this continued, Mrs. Slipaway's disposition did not improve—what woman's would have? She gave Mr. Slipaway many a bad five minutes. Wherein she was absolutely within her rights. Had Mr. Slipaway asked her to starve with him—so that he could pay the bills, she would cheerfully and gladly have acquiesced. But Mr. Slipaway did not ask that; no doubt, he didn't want to starve himself; there are people built in that selfish fashion.

It was in the midst of a situation thus perilous and complex for Mr. Slipaway, that those greater worries which he had confided to Mr. Briggs, had arisen.

“My dear Mrs. Slipaway!” Bridget returned ushering in a dark clad figure—that of an old-fashioned Baptist minister. And yet the minister was not old; his dolefulness seemed more a habit than

a natural garb. "My dear Mrs. Slipaway!" he repeated. "And how do you find yourself?"

"Poorly," said Mrs. Slipaway.

"You do look worried," he said, seating himself on the edge of a chair.

"I suspect we all have our worries," observed Mrs. Slipaway.

"Maybe they'll pass," said the caller.

"If they don't get worse," said the other.

"True; if they don't get worse," he assented.

"Well," he said perfunctorily, "if people didn't have worries, there wouldn't be any need for pastoral calls."

"There's some consolation in that," said Mrs. Slipaway mournfully.

"No matter how many worries we have, there's always some one got more," he observed.

"That cheers a little," said Mrs. Slipaway.

"I haven't seen Mr. Slipaway at church lately," he observed.

"No; he's sliding."

"Seriously?"

"I'm afraid so. When a woman marries a man to reform him—" Mrs. Slipaway paused; she felt she was going too far.

"As a *general* proposition," said the visitor with

an accent, "a woman who undertakes that responsibility, has her hands full. I am speaking only generally, of course."

"Of course." From Mrs. Slipaway. Perhaps the minister had heard of all the debts. "Some people are careless," she observed.

"Not criminally," he had the grace to put in.

"I hope not," said Mrs. Slipaway hastily. "I have certainly been troubled," she murmured. "Seems as if I must speak to some one—"

"Whom more appropriate than"—he tapped his breast.

"True. Who more appropriate? Our pastoral adviser! It's bills, principally. Whenever I speak to Mr. Slipaway, he promises to pay, but he forgets. Let us put it that way. Besides, he hasn't been acting natural of late. There's something wrong—more than butchers and bakers—only I can't fathom it."

"You don't think there's another?" The minister asked quickly and paused.

"Another?" said Mrs. Slipaway.

"Of course not."

"You don't mean—woman?" said Mrs. Slipaway tensely.

"No, no." Hastily. "Only, you see, I just came

from Mrs. Garvey, who had to get a divorce, and thinking of her—poor woman—the words slipped out—ridiculous, of course.”

“There’s been a strange man walking up and down in front,” said Mrs. Slipaway. “I asked him to leave the bill, and he said it wasn’t a bill.”

“No?” said the caller curiously.

“No,” said Mrs. Slipaway. “I wonder what it could have been?”

“Court-summons of some kind, do you suppose?”

Mrs. Slipaway started. “Horatio’s been seeing too much of that Johnnie Briggs,” she observed.

“Mr. Briggs?—who used—” again he paused.

“Might as well say it,” said Mrs. Slipaway firmly. “Call on me. He did. And he did me the honor—” She stopped. “Mr. Briggs’ motives might sometimes be questioned,” she observed. “I got my opinion of him. He was always trying to get me to invest.”

“Invest?” said the caller curiously. These tit-bits of gossip interested him keenly. Armed with them, he could hope to make his pastoral visits to others interesting.

“The insurance money from—” Mrs. Slipaway lifted her eyes to the crayon picture. “A sacred legacy.”

"To be preserved—?"

"Intact," said Mrs. Slipaway. "Yes; I wouldn't touch that insurance money for any one."

"And quite proper," he said.

"Johnnie Briggs would have liked to have got hold of it. He even—"

"But you preferred Mr. Slipaway," said the caller softly.

"Dear me," said Mrs. Slipaway, fearing she had been indiscreet. "You do draw one out so. It's an art, don't you think, to draw people out?"

"Far be it from me, to claim—" he began modestly.

"Yes, I regard it as a sacred souvenir," interrupted Mrs. Slipaway.

"Well, I must be going." The caller arose.

"You certainly have cheered me up," said Mrs. Slipaway. "Drop in again."

The caller said he would and was about to go, when the bell rang again, and hardly had Bridget time to open the door when a little man forced his way in. "Are you Mr. Slipaway?" he demanded rather belligerently.

"I?" said the caller, offended.

"Don't deny it. Well, this is for you." And he thrust a paper into the minister's hand.

“Bless my soul!” said the latter, looking at it. At that moment Horatio Slipaway and Johnnie Briggs peered in a window at the side. They heard the exclamations of the minister as he read from the paper; they saw Mrs. Slipaway grab it—and then Horatio fled the spot.

## CHAPTER IV

**M**R. SLIPAWAY walked hastily for several blocks from the neighborhood of his own domicile, with the sedulous Mr. Briggs at his heels. His feelings were not easily described; he was oblivious of people and his surroundings; he saw only the growing consternation on the minister's face as he contemplated the document intended for him (Horatio) and containing—what?—A fanciful recital of Mr. Slipaway's amatory adventures, drawn from the inimitable imagination of the fair lady in the case. No doubt she had that "pale, passionate" imagination of her class—female of the species who make a habit of preying on gentlemen afflicted with sympathetic inclinations.

The indignation and amazement depicted on the ministerial countenance as he scrutinized that damning but fraudulent document was burned on Mr. Slipaway's countenance, but what Mrs. Slipaway's face expressed after she had snatched the paper from the caller's hand, Mr. Slipaway could only divine. He had not remained to contemplate

that picture; but *his* imagination could paint it, with all the embellishments of that New England conscience—Mrs. Slipaway's heritage—as an awful and lowering background. Horatio entertained the greatest awe for that New England conscience; he had escaped the Pilgrim fathers, by inheritance, himself; his ancestors were, no doubt, a more frivolous lot.

And this awful revelation of Mr. Slipaway's presumable marital waywardness was but the beginning. That mere clerical error which made him responsible for the loss of so many thousands was yet to be unfolded to the world's—and Mrs. Slipaway's—startled ears.

Mechanically Mr. Slipaway got on a street-car, and Johnnie—faithful Johnnie—followed. Mr. Slipaway did not notice which way the car was going—whether toward the city, or from—what matter? Mr. Slipaway was at a loss where to lay his head that night. The revelation had come at home to-day; the other revelation might come at the office to-morrow. His employers had that New England conscience, too, and would “make good” so far as the indignant customer was concerned, but where would Horatio appear in the transaction? Maybe several courts would be struggling for the posses-

sion of his person at the same time! The divorce courts would claim him and the criminal courts would reach out a hand for his coat collar.

And the publicity?—Ah, the publicity. That was the terrible part of it all—or one of the most terrible features of his horrible embarrassments! A certain native shyness lurked behind Horatio's natural care-free disposition. To have the finger of scorn pointed at him—to know himself held up to public opprobrium—to have his traits, his very soul, and much that wasn't his very soul, analyzed by the heartless scribblers of the press—all this was intolerable. But of course the worst of all was Mrs. Slipaway, and that New England conscience of hers.

"Here, there—give me a newspaper!" Johnnie nodded toward a newsboy as the car stopped. Johnnie didn't seem to feel very bad; perhaps he was only trying to cheer up Mr. Slipaway by his (Johnnie's) cheerful countenance. Mr. Slipaway gazed at him with mingled reproach and wonder. Johnnie rattled the paper and, opening it, began to read. Mr. Slipaway marveled that any one could read a newspaper. For him, the world seemed coming to an end. Oh, if it only would. Just shuffle them all off, altogether—before he saw Mrs. Slipaway again—and then have it all over. That would be a nice

and comfortable way to settle everything—and there wouldn't ever be anything for any one to worry or care about any more. But the old world wouldn't end; it was bound to go on, getting more complicated and perplexing every day. Mr. Slip-away pondered mournfully—for an optimist. The world wouldn't end; he couldn't run away from his fate. He always came back to a single wistful desire.

If only he had been born some one else? Suddenly Johnnie gave a low chuckle.

"Hello," he said. "Here's a rum go."

"What?" said Horatio, with his thoughts a thousand miles away.

"Man fell off a railroad train, as Thomas Ryan; picked up unconscious; when he came to he insisted he was Mart Sullivan. Total loss of identity!"

"What's that?" said Horatio quickly.

"'Knocked unconscious as Thomas Ryan, a bricklayer; came to as Mart Sullivan, a plumber. Total loss of memory,' " read Johnnie. "'And the strangest part of the case is that while Mart Sullivan can repair any old pipe, at the regular union rate per hour, he can not lay bricks at all. Not only has he emerged from his experience with a totally new per-

sonality, but he has been born again with all the skill and natural camouflage of his new trade. He can idle longer and charge as much as any plumber in the trade, and he is already agitating a union to raise plumbers' wages three-quarters of a cent a minute.' "

Johnnie put down the paper. "Marvelous," he said.

Horatio sighed. "Some people have the luck. Just think of it! As Thomas Ryan he might have owed everybody. He falls down. Presto! all his bills are paid. For of course Mart Sullivan wouldn't pay them."

"Naturally not," said Johnnie.

"Maybe he is co-respondent in some delicate affair—fellow bricklayer's wife, sister, or mother-in-law? On the verge of something awful! Poor fellow worried to death! At the psychological moment tumbles off a train. Probably inebriated, trying to forget his troubles. Wakes up blissfully unconscious he ever had a single worry. Merrily he starts making holes in lead pipes and repairing them. He whistles at his work. He sends his helper back to the shop for several tools. He waits idly and happily, his wage-speedometer working joyously all the time. Lucky Mart! He never heard of the sister,

wife or the fascinating mother-in-law. Who wouldn't be a plumber?"

Mr. Slipaway's gaze grew more distant. "Now why was fate so good to that fellow, and so unkind to me? If he meets any saloon-keeper he owes he just gives them the gay 'Ha, ha!' Wouldn't know the man from Adam! As Mart—what was his name?—the plumber, he enters upon the primrose path. Why—"

Mr. Slipaway paused; the vision was too blissful—annoyingly so. Then abruptly his expression changed; his gaze became subtle and furtive. He looked sidewise at Johnnie; then his look shifted from the car to the pavement. Johnnie's eyes turned to his companion; something in the latter's gaze held him.

"Ha, ha!" said Johnnie suddenly. "What if—?"

"Don't!" said Mr. Slipaway hoarsely. "Some people have the luck," he repeated weakly. "Little bump—world of troubles—all gone—wake up—like new-born babe—all joyous—rainbows—sunshine—jazz bands—"

"I say?" said Johnnie significantly.

The two men looked at each other.

"Don't you dare suggest it," said Mr. Slipaway.

"Ha," said Johnnie. "It did occur to you?"

"I was only wishing—" began Mr. Slipaway once more, and stopped.

Johnnie touched his arm lightly. "Why don't you?" he said in soft sibilant tones.

Horatio breathed hard; Johnnie smiled; the car began to stop. Mr. Slipaway arose.

He did not notice where he was or where the car had stopped.

## CHAPTER V

**H**E hastened to the door; the car again started; Mr. Slipaway got off—backward! He got a rather hard bump; presumably, a bit harder than he had intended so he had some excuse to lie there, as if unconscious. Perhaps his head was going round and he really did feel dizzy and found it more comfortable just to lie there without motion. The car stopped; the excited conductor approached; he looked at Horatio and then appealed to the passengers, taking a few names. They (the passengers) had noticed, of course, the gentleman had got off after the car had started, and that he had got off backward, at that. The street-car conductor or motorman were in no way responsible for the accident, nor could the company be held liable. If the passenger was hurt, it was his own fault; no one but a country-jay or a fool would get off a car like that.

Horatio lay still; even when the conductor called him a few more pet names he did not jump up and try to punch the annoyed minion of the street-rail-

way corporation. His thoughts were otherwise (and not unpleasantly) occupied. He was trying to make up his mind WHO HE WOULD BE. His head pained him; his brains were in a jumble, but amid the confusion, this dominant idea stood forth. It was not a disagreeable sensation, although his head did ache somewhat, just to lie there, and ponder on a choice of personalities. Why, he could be whom he pleased. Wasn't the thought great? "Whom he pleased—"

Well, who should it be? He couldn't quite make up his mind on the instant. However, there was time to decide. He was master of the situation. At last he had his grip on fate. It might be nice to wake up a baseball player, with a crowd of adoring fans in the background; or an actor—a *matinée-idol* with a languishing train of love-lorn females in the background. Or a dancing-master—or a private secretary, with nothing to do. Or—? He could think of a hundred agreeable kind of people he would like to be, but he couldn't put his finger, at the moment, on the precise person into whose shoes he was going to jump.

Let the cold world pity, or abuse him—after the fashion of that street-car conductor; the joke was on the cold world. He heard now Johnnie's voice.

"Do you think he is really unconscious?" said that snake-in-the-grass.

"Oh, no," some one answered ironically. "He's just lying there for fun. He enjoys it."

"I wonder?" said Johnnie.

"Poor man," said a woman. "Is he dead?"

"I think not," said Johnnie.

But Horatio didn't mind anything Johnnie said. He felt blissfully aloof from that gentleman. Of one fact he was certain, whoever he decided to be, he would be a stranger to Johnnie.

They now carried Horatio into a drug-store; there was quite a bump on his head and they banded it. Then the hospital-wagon came up and they took Horatio away.

"Does any one know who he is?" said the medical man who came with the ambulance.

Johnnie did not answer; he reflected. Also, he was a bit curious. He felt that Mr. Slipaway could have answered for himself. Why didn't he? Johnnie decided to await developments. Possibly he also thought: Give Mr. Slipaway rope enough, etc. Maybe Mr. Slipaway was jumping from the frying-pan into the fire. If that should prove the case, Johnnie would be rather pleased. His liking for that gentleman, after the latter had won the widow

and that sacred legacy, was not to be measured. That sacred legacy Johnnie had coveted and regarded as his own special loot, when lo, and behold, the blithe Horatio had carried off the prize. But revenge was sweet. Johnnie wondered at Horatio's bold daring. He divined his project. And divining, still held his peace, and his tongue. Before it's over, he'll wish he hadn't done it, thought Johnnie, with supreme satisfaction. Johnnie could see a heap of unpleasant complications for Horatio.

But Mr. Slipaway saw only the world—his new world—in roseate hues. He dreamed blissfully in the ambulance. At the hospital he woke up. He had decided upon a personality—a very agreeable personality. It came to him like an inspiration. He knew just the person he wanted to be, and the best of it was, he *could be* that person.

"He seems to be coming to himself," observed one of the nurses, after Horatio had been tucked into a warm, clean, white bed among a lot of other sick people.

"Doctor didn't seem to think he was much hurt," said another nurse.

"You can't always tell," replied the first. "I once had a patient who had just touched his head on the corner of a mantel, and he died."

"Yes, there's heads and heads," agreed the other nurse.

"And some nuts are thicker than others," sententiously remarked the one who had spoken first. "These cracked-nut cases are certainly very hard to prognosticate."

At which precise moment, Horatio opened his eyes and gazed around him.

"Where am I?" he murmured.

"Isn't he the original old dear?" whispered one nurse to the other.

Horatio smiled sweetly. The nurse placed her cool hand on his fevered brow.

"How does it feel?" she asked.

"Pretty good."

"Quite like yourself?"

Horatio started. "Yes; I feel quite like myself."

"By the way, the doctor asked me to get your name, when you came to."

"My name?" said Horatio. "Oh! William Carter!"

"William Carter," she repeated, writing it on a slip of paper.

"To my friends—Bill Carter. That's my name."

"And your residence?"

"South America."

"Oh!"

"You see I just came back."

"Came back?"

"Yes; I've been away for years."

"So you are a stranger here?"

"A total stranger," said Horatio solemnly.

"That might account for it," she observed.

"What?"

"Your getting off a street-car backward. I suppose you only ride mules and llamas where you come from?"

"Our principal means of human transportation," observed Horatio.

And then she felt his pulse.

"Almost normal."

"Can I get up now and go?" asked Horatio. Already he wanted to stretch his wings. But the nurse shook her head.

"Oh, no, you couldn't get up yet. You must have been hurt pretty bad, to have stayed unconscious so long. And the doctor doesn't like to take any chances with these cracked n— damaged-head cases. He'll probably keep you here twenty-four hours at least, to find out if any complications arise."

"Complications?" said Mr. Slipaway. "What complications could arise?"

"Oh, he might want to probe, or do something."

Mr. Slipaway stirred uneasily.

"He's such a conscientious doctor," said the nurse. "But there! don't worry. I'm quite sure you're all right."

"I'm sure, too," said Mr. Slipaway heartily.

"Why, I don't feel as if there was a thing the matter with me."

"Remember everything?"

"Perfectly."

"Well, that's a very good sign," said the nurse. "Sometimes these damaged-head cases have queer ideas."

"Mine's clear as a bell," said Mr. Slipaway. "Didn't I tell you my name right off?"

"You certainly did," she said reassuringly. "Some damaged-head cases forget their names, but you had yours right at your tongue's end. Now go to sleep, and when you wake up, you'll be all nice and perfectly well."

Mr. Slipaway closed his eyes, but not to sleep. He was very busy planning. He and Bill Carter had been boyhood friends in the little village, not

very far away. Bill had always been of a reckless joyous nature. The little village hadn't been big enough to hold his high spirits; so Bill had gone away—to South America. Some people said he had become a bold buccaneer in the cause of sundry republics; others that he had struck a mine, and become rich, after which all information about him had ceased. Report said he had been killed; at any rate, he had completely disappeared.

As Bill Carter, a vista of adventure unfolded before Horatio's pleased vision. He liked to think of himself as that bold dashing personality. And had not Bill always been his boyhood idol? Already he could feel the inspiration of Bill. The thought of that gentleman's spirit and high buoyant temperament was as wine to Horatio's soul. Why, Bill was capable of great deeds; he, Horatio, had been but a worm. He saw himself doing things as Bill would do them. He would be a credit to Bill. He could not imagine himself ever as Horatio Slipaway again. Horatio, forsooth!—who hardly dared call his soul his own. Nothing timorous about him (Bill) now. He kept calling himself Bill Carter in his own mind, so as to get fully accustomed to himself as Bill Carter. He had once heard that if you

repeat often enough to yourself anything that isn't so, you gradually come to think the fallacy a verity. That was the case with Horatio.

"My name's Bill Carter, and I don't give a d—who knows it," he said to himself.

Even his way of expressing himself, to himself, had become Bill's. That's the way Bill would talk. Mr. Slipaway dozed happily.

## CHAPTER VI

**J**OHNIE BRIGGS awaited developments. Johnnie was a good waiter. Also, he was a good dissembler. In a way, he felt that Horatio had robbed him, for Johnnie had once figured out just the place where he meant to put the widow's nest-egg, and it had been most annoying to have Horatio come along and bear away that nice fat insurance-pot, together with the fair possessor thereof. For it had been the thought of that treasure that had caused Johnnie once to propose to the lady. That her declination had been frank and to the point did not serve to dissuade Johnnie he had been cheated out of something substantial, in a worldly sense, by the quite inoffensive Mr. Slip-away.

"No, Johnnie," the widow had told him firmly. "It isn't I you want to marry; it's that sacred legacy. That memory of a man who is now in a happier sphere. And the worst is, Johnnie, I'm afraid you might persuade me to part with it—you and your glib tongue and smooth ways, if I accepted

you. So for the sake of that tender memorial, I won't marry you, Johnnie. Instead, I have concluded to marry Mr. Slipaway. I can keep that sacred trust from him. He might timidly suggest my parting with some of it for expenses, but that is all. I know my first husband's wishes in the matter, Johnnie, and I am quite sure he would not approve of your marrying that souvenir of his affections for me."

The widow's words had a ring of finality about them. Nevertheless, Johnnie felt that had Horatio kept out of the affair, he (Johnnie) might have won out. Anyhow, the more complicated grew Horatio's troubles, the more, secretly, Johnnie rubbed his hands. He even began figuring that if she and Mr. Slipaway were divorced, that nest-egg might, once more, be within his (Johnnie's) possible grasp. Johnnie had in mind a zinc-prospect he could develop with that nest-egg. Indeed, there were times when Johnnie felt the only thing that separated him from a dazzling fortune was the non-possession of that nest-egg. The thought of it had become an obsession with him.

Mr. Briggs had a premonition that before very long he would hear from the fair possessor of that

coveted nest-egg. Nor was he wrong. About twenty-four hours after Mr. Slipaway's sad "accident," Mrs. Slipaway called up Johnnie Briggs at his office.

"Mr. Briggs, I called you up to ask you about Mr. Slipaway. Do you know where I can find him?"

"I would suggest calling him at his office," said Mr. Briggs in his softest tones.

"I have," said Mrs. Slipaway, "but he hasn't been there, to-day."

"No?" said Johnnie, in accents of well-feigned surprise.

"And he didn't come home last night," said the lady.

"Oh!" said Johnnie, as if endeavoring to mask his deep disapproval.

"No," said the lady. Her voice was more ominous than apprehensive. It spoke volumes for what Mr. Slipaway might expect when he did return to his happy fireside. "It is quite unlike Mr. Slipaway voluntarily thus to absent himself, and I am therefore somewhat at a loss to understand the matter."

Johnnie whistled.

"I know," continued the lady, "you see a good

deal of Mr. Slipaway, and I thought, in consequence, I would call you and inquire if you could give me any information?"

"I am delighted to have you call upon me for any service, my dear Mrs. Slipaway," said Johnnie in his courtliest manner, "and I am sorry not to be of any assistance in this—ah—delicate matter."

"I didn't know but what you might have been with him," observed the lady succinctly.

"Me?" said Johnnie in a somewhat hurt tone. "Out all night? Me, a fireside body! Why, I'm a regular *home*-person. I wouldn't stay out all night for anything."

He heard a slight sniff at the other end of the line. Mrs. Slipaway was not to be deceived by masculine camouflage.

"It is certainly very strange," said the lady, reverting at once to the subject of Mr. Slipaway.

Johnnie smiled; things were beginning to get most interesting, but still he volunteered no information. He felt himself playing a very deep game.

"Have you—ah!—reported the matter to the police?" he said non-committally.

"I have not," she returned. "Somehow, I do not think he is *locked* up."

"No? I have heard of perfectly innocent persons

being locked up. I wouldn't imply Mr. Slipaway had been really guilty of any crime, of course." Yet Johnnie's voice implied that he wouldn't be exactly surprised if his old friend Horatio had gone out and done something that might have led to his forcible incarceration. His manner was that of one who would prepare Mrs. Slipaway for the worst. "He did seem dreadfully worried yesterday afternoon," continued Johnnie.

"No doubt!" From Mrs. Slipaway grimly.

"Mere little *trifling* financial difficulties," went on Johnnie, making light—too light—of the matter. "I don't like to suggest it, but—" Johnnie paused.

"No; he hasn't made way with himself," said the lady. "Some men might under the circumstances, but—" It was her turn to pause. Johnnie coughed discreetly—just as if he hadn't heard.

"You don't suppose any accident—" he now ventured to suggest.

"Accident?" breathed the lady, with rising accents.

"Run over by an automobile—thumped by a thug—sand-bagged—oh, one of those accidents that are apt to happen to any one."

"Somehow, I don't think he has been seriously injured," said the lady. There was a reason for

Horatio not wanting to come home—that thought was more in her mind.

“Hope not,” said Johnnie fervently. “Gee! You’re getting me worried—”

“I don’t believe I should worry—exactly,” murmured the lady.

“But, great Scott! He may be—why—why don’t you call up the hospitals?”

“Think I shall,” she said tranquilly, and rang off.

Johnnie hung up the phone. At that moment he looked very well pleased with himself. Mr. Slipaway had come to, long before this, no doubt—and he had *not* apprised his wife of his accident. Ergo!—Johnnie did a dance-step. Perhaps the nest-egg wouldn’t be so unattainable, after all.

Mrs. Slipaway called up the hospitals and inquired about the emergency cases. No; no one by the name of Slipaway had been received during the past twenty-four hours by any of the institutions. At one of them, however, they had an unconscious patient who had been shocked by an electric wire. They had no idea who the man was, and if Mrs. Slipaway cared to call?—Mrs. Slipaway would call.

She did. She was led to a bed where a man lay. He was a big, shambling figure of a man, with dark

hair. Mr. Slipaway had light hair and he was rather small.

"No; that isn't my husband," observed Mrs. Slipaway, when at that moment some one walked down the aisle of the ward. Mrs. Slipaway gasped. "That—that—" she began.

"That's Mr. Carter — William Carter, he calls himself—"

"Carter?" gasped Mrs. Slipaway.

"Yes; he was brought in yesterday. Fell from a street-car. His injury, however, was very slight, and now he's leaving—discharged. He's from South America. Poor man! I don't suppose they have street-cars down there—and he got off backward—"

"Why—why—" stammered Mrs. Slipaway, at which precise moment the reincarnated Bill chanced to turn his head, just before leaving the ward. His gaze fell upon Mrs. Slipaway, and that good lady naturally expected a swift response of recognition. Instead, Mr. William Carter's face did not change in the least; his expression was jaunty, debonaire. His glance, in which there was no expression to indicate he had ever seen Mrs. Slipaway before, passed from that much amazed lady to the nurse.

"*Adios!*" He waved his hand with much gallantry to the nurse; murmured more words which *might*

have been Spanish; touched his fingers to his lips, flicked them coquettishly to the white-robed attendant, and then vanished.

"Well, I'm—I'm—" gasped Mrs. Slipaway.

"Those South Americans are very polite, aren't they?" said the nurse, obviously flattered by the reincarnated Bill's ardent manner of leave-taking.

"South Americans?" stammered the caller.

"Most persons, when they leave, just bark good-bye at you. Just as if they're glad to get away. Not very polite, I call it."

Mrs. Slipaway breathed deeply. "Did he say he was from South America?"

"Of course. He is. He told me all about his life. I never met a more sympathetic patient."

Mrs. Slipaway's face was a study.

"You see, he's been there for nearly twenty years," went on the nurse.

"Twenty years?" Mrs. Slipaway mechanically raised her hand to her brow.

"He left home when hardly more than a boy."

Mrs. Slipaway gazed toward the door through which the reincarnated Bill had vanished.

"And he's so glad to get back," continued the nurse.

"After twenty years?" murmured Mrs. Slipaway, as if hardly knowing what she was saying.

"Twenty years of hardship and adventure," went on her informant.

"Hardship—adventure—" muttered Mrs. Slipaway.

"Oh, he tells the most wonderful stories. You see, he was in Patagonia, or was it Bolivia? I forget which."

"Say both," the other said mechanically.

"Yes; I dare say. He has been a great traveler."

Mr. Slipaway had hardly ever left home. His traveling had been confined to a very narrow circumference. Mrs. Slipaway vaguely began to wonder if it was all a dream.

"You seem to have become—well, rather interested in your patient?" she murmured perfunctorily.

"Oh, yes. The doctors encourage us to. Study their psychology, they call it. After you know a little about a patient's psychology you can handle the case so much more efficiently and intelligently. The modern way! Encourage the patient; let him talk about himself. Helps him get well."

"This—ah!—patient doesn't seem to have been very badly hurt?" observed Mrs. Slipaway slowly.

"Fortunately not. The doctor put him through a memory test, and found the result perfect."

"My word!" exclaimed Mrs. Slipaway. She could think of nothing stronger to say at the moment.

"Yes; the patient remembered every little detail—all his past life!"

"Did he ever mention having been married?"

"Oh, yes."

"Ah!" said Mrs. Slipaway.

"To a Brazilian lady—"

"Oh!" said Mrs. Slipaway.

"By whom he had three children—"

"Three?"

"Three lovely children—all dead!"

"How sad!" said Mrs. Slipaway, staring straight before her. "And did he tell you why he had returned to America?"

"Oh, yes. To revisit his little native town, where he was born."

"How touching!"

"You seem interested in him yourself," said the nurse.

"He reminds me of some one—"

"You have known?"

"Slightly!"

"These chance resemblances do happen," said the

nurse psychologically. "Sometimes it's almost startling."

"It is," said Mrs. Slipaway. "But I mustn't take any more of your time."

"Too bad you didn't find him you came for!" observed the nurse sympathetically.

"No use of worrying," said Mrs. Slipaway.

"You're sure that electrocuted case isn't him? His face is twisted up a bit, and when the twist comes out—"

"I'm quite sure," said Mrs. Slipaway.

"Good day, ma'am."

"Good day!"

"Did you find him?" telephoned Johnnie Briggs, later in the day.

"I did not," said Mrs. Slipaway. "His disappearance is a sad mystery. Sad!"

But somehow, Johnnie thought her voice did not sound full of grief. Johnnie wondered. Also, he rejoiced.

"Is there anything I can do?" he said in well-simulated sadness.

"Nothing."

"If there is, call upon me."

"Thank you. At present I want to think."

"Well, don't brood," Johnnie cautioned her solicitously.

"I won't," she said, and there was determination in her tone.

"Bully!" said Johnnie. "Keep up your nerve."

"I will."

"Promise," said Johnnie, with a world of anxiety. He tried to make his voice a little shaky.

"I promise," said Mrs. Slipaway unemotionally.

"You don't know how much I admire your courage," avowed Johnnie, but there was no one now at the other end to answer. Mrs. Slipaway had, presumably, forsaken fruitless conversation for much-desired reflection.

## CHAPTER VII

THE reincarnation of Bill stepped blithely on his way. He squared his shoulders and set his pace in tune to his spirits. The world was full of sunshine; he didn't care much where he went or what he did. If he had met the "passion-pale" demoiselle of the typewriter, he would have gazed into her hungry eyes with superb aplomb and total lack of recognition. Even his walk had changed and was now highly aggressive. He brushed rather forcefully against some one; Horatio, of painful memory, would have half-turned and shyly apologized. The reincarnation of Bill frowned loftily, as much as to say: "Who the deuce *you* bumping into? Have a care, fellow!"

In his new creation, Mr. Slipaway bought a big black cigar, and, thrusting it between his lips, set it at an upward and jaunty angle. Mr. Slipaway that had been would have puffed away at a rather mournful-looking, long, cheap cheroot, drooping from his mouth; the new Mr. Slipaway—or rather Bill Carter—carried his lighted weed clenched be-

tween his teeth and tilted sportily skyward, as if he didn't give a hang for the world, or a whoop who knew it. The erstwhile Mr. Slipaway had his moments of modesty, or self-depreciation; the made-over Slipaway was gloriously shorn of all traits that partook of bashfulness or shyness. No one could have a better opinion of himself than the renovated or transformed Slipaway.

But then, he wasn't really Slipaway. That entirely distasteful person had slipped not into oblivion but into his proper place. Yes; he did have a place, albeit a humble one. In their boyhood days Horatio Slipaway had been a hero-worshipping friend of dashing Bill Carter. Henceforth Horatio would not be totally forgotten, but would shine dimly, in an obscure background, as a little "shaver" who had enjoyed the proud privilege of having, once upon a time, known Bill.

Of course, the reincarnation of Bill had not neglected, in his mental calculations, the possibility—nay, probability—of being hunted down, surrounded and corraled by sundry and divers persons, interested in asserting or proving he was really Horatio Slipaway. But even this contingency carried with it many saving clauses. Mrs. Slipaway's reproaches or evidences of disapproval, verbal or otherwise,

would lose most of their weight, bestowed upon one who she knew considered himself an entirely different person; indeed, a total stranger, to that good lady. He could appear surprised; mildly interested—but beyond that no emotion would assail him. He would appear polite, of course; maybe he would wink at the good lady and ask her what was her little game. Something new in the “badger” line?

And, knowing the reincarnation of Bill to be profoundly and irrevocably possessed of the conviction that he *was* Mr. William Carter, Mrs. Horatio Slipaway would most certainly not wish to live with that gentleman. To all moral intents and purposes it would be quite wicked and improper to do so. Why, it would be almost like living with another man. Indeed, wouldn't it be just the same thing? Besides, what would the reincarnation of Bill think of her? What would the minister say? The neighbors, too? No; Mrs. Horatio Slipaway could not take the reincarnation of Bill home with her, to give him a piece of her mind about the “passion-pale” typist and sundry other little, and big, matters, in which that nincompoop, Slipaway, had been such a poor fish as to become involved.

As to the “passion-pale” one, he (Bill) would snap his fingers at her. He didn't know her, but

he would just as soon get acquainted if she wanted to. It was all one, to bluff old Bill Carter; all the fair sex looked alike to him. Just as soon have a sweetheart in every port! Hadn't he been a bold sailor-boy in his early youth? You couldn't do much to a man who didn't know and couldn't be convinced he was the chap you were doing it to. Even a pursuing passion-flower tripped and fell before such a devious and ungraspable proposition. The edge of malice, the sharp point of revenge, were alike dulled against the armor of the reincarnation of Bill.

Mr. Slipaway had once read in a fairy tale of a man who was possessed of a magical veil, possessing the quality of making the wearer thereof invisible to the world. The person who owned this desirable veil could ironically chuckle at the importunities of designing females, importunate courtiers and hordes of creditors. Mr. Slipaway had, in his early childhood, often longed for this veil—as who, indeed, has not? Now you're here, and then you're not. And you're not, when something disagreeable is about to happen.

Now Mr. Slipaway didn't possess this wonderful veil, but he had surrounded himself with an aura of camouflage, by means of which practically the

same results were attained. Psychologically, he had made himself invisible to the world; psychologically, he could stay invisible as long as he pleased. How long he would continue along the merry path of illusion and mystification he did not know. He was just gaily treading the primrose path of the felicitous present. Let the future look to itself; he, Bill Carter, was going to enjoy a vacation free from all worries.

He felt in his pockets to see how he (Bill) stood financially at this memorable moment. Twenty dollars—it was not much, but that was all he possessed. Yet that did not worry him; he knew that Bill would make that twenty grow; you couldn't keep him down—not much. Twenty dollars, Bill would, by hook or by crook, make to grow like a snowball rolling over and over. Twenty dollars, with Bill, would soon become two hundred, or two thousand. The gentleman he (Slipaway) had become had always had the luck of acquiring ready money; that was one of the reasons he (Slipaway) had selected Bill as an object for reincarnation. What would Bill do first? Probably play the horses.

The reincarnation of Bill did. He had no doubt of the result, and so took a very long shot; indeed, he had such confidence in the luck of Bill that he

was only sorry the shot wasn't "longer." He would have been just as confident if it had been about three hundred to one, instead of thirty to one. The reincarnation of Bill wasn't even surprised when he took the money. He was now in a position to carry out the program he had evolved in his brain while dozing, or seeming to, and listening to the chit-chat of his nurse, at the hospital. Mr. Slipaway took a street-car to the railway station and there bought a ticket to a certain little village a few hours distant. But, before boarding the train, he acquired a small grip at a store near the station, and had it marked with the letters, "W. Carter." After which he shoved a few magazines in the grip, lending it weight and dignity.

"Have you heard Bill Carter's come back?" the village postmaster observed to the local doctor of Blinkum, as the latter dropped in the next day, at the usual hour, for his mail.

"Carter—Carter—?" said the doctor, peering anxiously into his mail (one letter) for any stray checks that might be — but were not — enclosed. "Not that harum-scarum—"

"Been only one Bill Carter in this village since

I been here," said the postmaster, "and that's going on fifty years."

"Well, well," said the doctor, concealing his disappointment in his mail, "and so Bill's come back. In my day, I've seen the whole family buried, except Bill."

"Maybe you think he's come back to accommodate *you*," said the postmaster jocularly. "So you could finish the job!"

"Mrs. Carter was the last that was taken," said the other, ignoring a species of humor little to his liking. "She went while Bill was away. And she's up there in the little churchyard."

"She would be," said the postmaster irreverently. "Yes; Bill's come back."

"What for?" asked the other. "Everything was sold for the debts—not enough to pay the funeral expenses. Old house was foreclosed—went to Deacon Jones. Bill isn't surely coming back in the expectations there is any estate to claim."

"No; he ain't looking for any estate. He's come back for *sentiment*."

"What?" said the doctor.

"Sentiment," repeated the postmaster. "Bill's come back because he had a *longing* to. At least,

that's what he told the tavern-keeper, up the road, where he's stopping. Says he longed to see some of the old town folks—"

"Jest a few old relics of 'em left," said the other.

"Said he longed to roam around among the sights of his happy childhood."

"'Happy childhood'—did he say that?"

"He did."

"Well, it might have been happy for Bill, but it weren't for anybody else. Bill could raise more—"

"Cain?" suggested the postmaster.

"That'll do!"

"Also come back just to show folks the report of his demise was slightly exaggerated," went on the other. "Been down in South America, and he's done well. He's got a wad of money as big around as your neck. Maybe we'd better organize one of those 'Welcome Home' committees?" jocularly.

"I wouldn't mind acting as chairman," suggested the doctor.

"Ha, ha!" laughed the postmaster.

But the other frowned. He didn't see the joke.

## CHAPTER VIII

THERE was a species of fantastic logic about Horatio Slipaway's one-rôle act entitled "The Home-Coming of Bill." After recovering consciousness he had professed to the world in general that he was Mr. William Carter. No matter how ridiculous his actions might appear to himself, knowing he wasn't in reality that redoubtable gentleman, he had to go through a certain performance with all the seriousness that Mr. William Carter himself would have displayed under precisely the same circumstances. What would William Carter have done, on his return from South America, finding himself in the near proximity, after many, many years, of the little village where he had first seen the light of day? Would he have turned his back on the old town, with an indifferent shrug of the shoulders? No, no! Mr. William Carter was a man of sentiment; he would drop in on the old neighbors, let them see him, and how he had prospered—apparently—and exchange reminiscences.

Mr. Carter would—as the reincarnation of Bill

did—spend money lavishly at the little tavern on any one who remembered him and whom he remembered. As Horatio Slipaway had passed *his* early childhood in the little village that had once been honored by the presence of Bill, the reincarnation of Bill had no difficulty in mingling and communing with sundry choice spirits acquainted with Mr. Carter's early experiences and certain more or less reprehensible traits of character. Mr. Carter did not, however, lavish much of his time on these sociable souls who hung around the principal source of village liquid refreshment; he mingled, indeed, but with an indubitable consciousness of what was due his own high dignity as a gentleman of means and position.

When he departed they were singing his praises. He tossed to the barkeeper, however, before going, a bill of such goodly denomination, that they could continue their sweet chortling in his honor. The act afforded great satisfaction to that consciousness of Mr. Slipaway which lurked somewhere in the background of the reincarnated Bill. The pale ghost of all that was left of Mr. Slipaway was pleased he could do things in this large generous manner. Why, he had chucked that bill at the barkeeper just like a grandee. As he walked out he

felt their concentrated and admiring gaze focused on the small of his back. It lent lightness to his step, but as he trod the shabby old streets of the desolate old village his look grew soberer.

Here were signs of attenuation, not growth. The village, instead of sprouting, looked like a withered plant. There were no new buildings, no new houses, no new barns, while those that continued to exist seemed rather to endure by some gracious act of providence than through any specific ability on their own part not to fall down. The reincarnation of Bill gazed around him mournfully. At that solemn moment he might almost have sung with the poet: "Sweet Auburn, loveliest village of the plain."

He paused at the one general combination store—which combination included, among other departments, a small and modest corner devoted to flowers and plants. The proprietor looked as if *he* needed sprinkling, he was so dusty and dry. The reincarnation of Bill at once introduced himself.

"Land's sakes! Bill Carter what threw a stone through my window—?"

"The same."

"And put sand in my sugar barrel?"

"Sure it was *I* put the sand in?" laughed the caller.

And so they went on reciting more of Bill's misdeeds, and Horatio felt he was having a real nice time. Oh, if he, himself, *had* only done all those things! The deep inner consciousness that he hadn't was the only secret pang he experienced. How he regretted his comparatively quiet and orderly childhood! Who was the old dunderhead that said virtue was its own reward? Well, that sad sobersides Slipaway was now getting "some vacation" from his former goody-goody self. It was such joy to talk about these juvenile misdeeds! If he, Horatio Slipaway, had come back in his proper person, what would there have been to talk about? Hardly anything! Folks would only have yawned and said:

"Slipaway? Slipaway? Yes; there *was* somebody here of that name. But we don't remember much about him, except he *was* here. Went away some time ago, but don't remember *just* when."

That was it; Horatio had never impressed himself much on the community, or any community. He could slide out of it and not be much missed. People would speak languidly of the fact that he had once existed there; but when you mentioned Bill's name they woke up. Mr. Slipaway felt that in his new capacity he was acquiring much valuable information and a brand-new kind of philosophy.

Be good, if you can, but don't be a nonentity! He began to feel it was almost a crime to be a nonentity.

For some time he swelled and preened himself with the borrowed plumage of Bill's bright and disorderly deeds, and then his face grew soberer. What would Bill do now? What he, Horatio, did.

"Touchingest thing you ever saw," said the combination store man to the village doctor, who came into the place later that day.

"Referring to Bill Carter that's got back? I heard he'd been up to look at the old home—house where he was born."

"Wasn't just what I was referring to. Know where he has gone?"

"No."

"Churchyard!" Succinctly. "You see, he and me were talking and exchanging old-time anecdotes, and I was calling him Bill and he was calling me Hank, just as if he wasn't a millionaire and me what I be, when suddenly his face gets sober-like. 'To think of me jesting here, and her up there!' At first I didn't get his meaning. 'The little churchyard,' he says. And then I knew what he was referring to."

“Yes; Mrs Carter died about ten years after Will went away,” said the doctor in a practical professional tone. “She survived Mr. Carter by about six years. The cause of her demise was gin and certain little injuries playfully inflicted upon her by Mr. Carter when she and that gentleman had been indulging too freely. Mr. Carter, no doubt, died as he would have preferred, with his boots on, and suffering from a rather strong attack of D. T.’s. Mrs. Carter’s end did not attain quite to the D. T. heights of Mr. Carter’s tumultuous finale; the injuries inflicted by Mr. Carter developed complications—internally—that interfered with her natural desire to follow his glorious example.”

“A mother’s a mother for a’ that,” said the storekeeper solemnly, paraphrasing the poet’s line. “And as I were saying, it was the touchinest thing. ‘Make me up a wreath,’ says Bill in a low deep voice, ‘and put in it the kind of flowers that us’t to grow alongside the old house.’ Here his voice kinda broke. ‘Sweet-williams?’ says I. And he looked at me sorter sad-like. ‘I believe they were sweet-williams,’ he says. ‘Your own name, too,’ says I, trying to be jocular-like, he looked so solemn. He breathed harder. ‘You needn’t mind about the sweet-williams,’ says he. ‘Might look kind of

egotistical, putting them in. But there's those other flowers that grew near the well—' "

"With the moss-covered bucket! Moss would grow on that bucket!" murmured the doctor.

" 'Daisies, simple daisies,' " went on the storekeeper, raising his voice slightly. " 'And geraniums and pansies,' I reminded him. 'Yes; put them in. Put them all in,' says he. And you should have seen that wreath when I was through. It was the most wonderful wreath. And all the time Bill stood there, and telling me to spare no expense, and to stick in another of this and that. I tell you there's a son to be proud of.' " The storekeeper spoke louder. He didn't quite like that professional, non-emotional expression on the doctor's face. "Showed me there's a lot of good in the world. Think of a man coming back like that! And taking all that trouble! I tell you he did me a lot of good—most as much good as if I'd gone to church. And if I was a minister, I could preach a sermon about it, and dash it if I wouldn't! I bet I could just preach a sermon that would bring tears to the eyes."

"No doubt," said the doctor dryly.

"When he spoke about the old well—"

"For which Mrs. Carter had no use!" Sotto voce, from the doctor.

"—his voice was shaky. 'The cool water from those rocky depths!—I shall never forget the taste of it!' says Bill."

"Mr. Carter never knew!" said the doctor.

The other shook his head disapprovingly. "Even you would have been moved, if you'd been there," he said, "when I offered to take the wreath and Bill wouldn't let me! No, sir; he was bound to carry it there himself. And he did. He wouldn't trust it to no one—"

"For fear a flower or two might fall out!"

The other gazed at the doctor reproachfully. "If I didn't know, Doc, your bark was worse than your bite, I'd think you kinda stony-hearted."

"Well, I haven't yet seen Mr. William Carter, the returned wanderer, drinking from the old well," laughed the doctor. "Though he was drinking something when I went by the tavern not long ago!"

"Jest dropped in to see what the old place looked like!" said the other.

"No doubt! Old family memorial!" And the doctor went out to his buggy and drove away.

## CHAPTER IX

MRS. SLIPAWAY was a methodical woman who seldom jumped to a conclusion. Her mental processes were slow, but fairly logical where they did not come in contact with a few inherited predilections by which she, in common with the rest of the world, was more or less subconsciously swayed.

When first she had learned that an unknown man had been injured by a live wire and was lying unconscious in a hospital, her initial emotions were those of quick womanly sympathy; she feared for Horatio. Forgotten for the moment were the process-server and the "passion-pale" lady. Though only for the moment! Mrs. Slipaway had hastened to the hospital, full of sympathy; possibly hoping the unconscious man *was* Mr. Slipaway, in which event she would later point to a "lesson." Retribution! The wicked shall not thrive. And when the lesson had sunk in—deeply—she would forgive and forget—if she could. And no doubt she could—in time! Yes, in time—plenty of time!

What, then, had been her emotions when she had seen that the injured unconscious patient was not her husband, but had also, a moment later, observed with her own startled gaze another patient, now recovered, and who was the perfect image of Mr. Horatio Slipaway, walk down the ward and out of the door with a backward look of complete non-recognition for herself? With what mental confusion had she listened to the nurse elucidating all about the recovered patient and eliminating totally Mr. Horatio Slipaway and substituting therefor a brand-new, completely distasteful stranger from a far land, Mr. William Carter, who said "*adios*" instead of the familiar "ta, ta!" and who threw kisses in pantomime to forward hospital hussies.

When Mrs. Slipaway had told Johnnie Briggs that she wanted to "think," she had conveyed to that too sedulous gentleman her precise mental state upon her return from her errand of mercy to the hospital. At first she had struggled with the problem as a strange coincidence. Frequently people *did* look alike, but hardly to this degree. That did seem most unlikely. Moreover, there was the "*adios*" and the phantom kisses to be accounted for; Mr. Slipaway would hardly dare thus to comport himself before her very eyes, though he might be bold

as a lion with "passion-pale" dames on other occasions. The doctor had said the memory test was perfect. That meant that William Carter ("Bill, to his friends") had passed the test as William Carter. His fall had not injured his brain. All of which sounded very plausible, but—

Where was Mr. Slipaway? He did not come home; she heard no word of him. Fortunately, the "nest-egg" was large and ample, and she could very well take care of herself if she wanted to. Also there was a life insurance policy Horatio had left behind him, but her thoughts did not linger on this. She did not wish to have Mr. Slipaway pass on to the land of shadows; on the contrary, she earnestly desired him to reappear in the flesh. She had married him to reform him, and that job was still incomplete—by a long ways. You can't reform that which has mysteriously disappeared. Nor can you forgive—if not forget—the transgressions of some one who has vanished into thin air. It was very puzzling. Also it was very annoying. It was like trying to find some particularly hard pieces in an unusually elaborate picture puzzle.

The very audacity of Mr. Slipaway's plan baffled her. Her simple brain did not delve into the subtleties of that gentleman's complex mental apparatus.

If Mr. Slipaway had had a twin brother—but the brother's name would not be Carter. So she ran up against a stone wall again.

She came back to "Carter." She had a vague idea of having heard of a William Carter—or was it "Bill Carter"?—somewhere, sometime. She racked her brain, but could not just recall. She called up Johnnie Briggs. He *was* glad to hear her voice; no doubt of that.

"No news of Horatio?" he asked quickly.

"No; but never mind about that now! What I wanted to ask you, Mr. Briggs, is this: Did you ever hear of a William Carter?"

"Carter?" said Johnnie. "Carter? Lemme see. Not's I know of. Of course, there's lots of Carters. But what's Carter got to do with Horatio?"

"I didn't say he had anything to do with him." Mrs. Slipaway was a woman quite capable of keeping her own counsel. "I just asked you a question—that is all, Mr. Briggs."

"Oh," said Johnnie disappointedly.

"Good-by," said Mrs. Slipaway.

"Hold on," said Johnnie, but the lady was no longer there.

For some time after the lady had rung off Johnnie sat pondering. "Carter?"—Mrs. Slipaway evi-

dently had a clue of some kind she was working on, though how important Mr. Briggs could not divine. Suddenly Johnnie remembered — Horatio had once mentioned a Bill Carter—a boy whom he had known as a “kid” back in the old village. What was the name of the village? Johnnie couldn’t for the life of him recall. Still thinking, he went out for lunch—a simple repast of beans and custard pie, in keeping with the modest purse and the high cost of living. Johnnie had his theories, and he was playing a waiting game; he would let others fuss and stew and he would quietly sit back. At the proper time, when Mr. Slipaway was fairly suspended by the noose of his own making, Johnnie would step in as a sympathetic friend—of Mrs. Slipaway.

But the good lady had called upon him for information. It behooved him to furnish that information. Johnnie did not know what it portended. At that moment a little old gentleman holding guardedly—for the place was thronged—a plate of what purported to be chicken pie in one hand, and a cup of coffee in the other, sat down beside Johnnie. The latter recognized in his next-chair neighbor a superannuated bookkeeper who had been in the employ of Mr. Slipaway’s employers for a pe-

riod of years beyond the memory of such comparatively newcomers into the financial district as he (Johnnie).

Mr. Briggs, after an exchange of commonplaces with the superannuated gentleman, led the conversation to Mr. Slipaway. Perhaps the superannuated gentleman might know the name of the little village from which Horatio had hailed. He did not ask the question at once; he merely remarked that he had had some conversation with Mrs. Slipaway about that lady's husband and that Mrs. Slipaway had seemed most anxious.

"Strangest case I ever heard of," observed the old gentleman after he had devoured his chicken (veal) pie and had further fortified his frugal repast by skipping over to the counter for a doughnut. "No troubles—no worries—happy home—"

"Eh?" said Johnnie. Then—"I rather understood Horatio was—well, a little bit worried about—expenses," he stammered.

The old gentleman chuckled, but he said nothing. His manner made Johnnie quite curious.

"I suppose you—ah!—are all very anxious he should be found? Get back to work, I mean?" observed Mr. Briggs with as much tact as he was capable of.

"One would infer that, wouldn't one?" said the other, and he chuckled again. At the same time his Adam's apple worked up and down, as if anticipatorily, while he eyed the non-digestible doughnut.

"Of course he would," said Johnnie, with false enthusiasm.

The superannuated gentleman eyed the doughnut and then he eyed Johnnie. He seemed about to say something, but he didn't. Mr. Briggs reflected that was one of the chief and most annoying characteristics of superannuated gentlemen; they appear on the point of giving utterance to most interesting bits of conversational chit-chat, and then they "peter out." They arouse curiosity without satisfying it, the while certain physical idiosyncrasies—like that ascending and descending Adam's apple—make themselves too pertinently, if not offensively, apparent. Instead of unburdening himself of a choice morsel of gossip, the aged one took a bite. Then he got up.

"Going?" said Johnnie. "I should think you'd sit a bit and let it digest."

The "old 'un" turned a twinkling eye on Johnnie. He knew Johnnie was not concerned about his digestion.

"Mr. Slipaway talked to me about financial anxieties," observed Johnnie desperately. Perhaps that, he reflected, would get behind the tough old skin of this monument of discretion.

"Indeed? Financial anxieties? Quite so," said the other, and with another chuckle walked out.

At that moment Johnnie quite hated him. He had forgotten to ask if he knew the name of the village Horatio had come from. The recollection of that mysterious chuckle of the superannuated bookkeeper got on Mr. Briggs' nerves that afternoon. Horatio had told him he had made a mistake and sold, instead of bought, thousands of shares for some one. What if?—Johnnie suddenly whistled. Then he sought a financial paper. A light burst upon Johnnie. Mr. Slipaway's mistake, instead of being a disaster, had ultimately netted the lucky investor a small fortune. No wonder the superannuated one had chuckled. Why, Mr. Slipaway might be regarded as a regular mascot by the wealthy Mr. Vancourtland—yes, that was the customer's name. He might even divide the profits with Mr. Slipaway, and intrust all his investing or speculating to Horatio. Whew! Some luck for Horatio! Out of disaster had sprung victory. But he did not

know. Fortunately—not! And he (Johnnie) would certainly not inform him.

Let him hide in his hole—wherever it might be—with visions of lost fortunes, defalcations, breach of promise suits, etc., floating before him! Let him think the worst! Nor would Mr. Briggs breathe of his suspicions of Horatio's stroke of luck at the office to Mrs. Slipaway. He wouldn't for the world enhance Horatio's reputation for financial shrewdness or acumen in the eyes of that lady. But later Johnnie ventured to call Mrs. Slipaway on the phone.

"I've been thinking hard all day on account of you," he said. "This morning you asked me a question. I could not, at the moment, answer it. But since then I've recalled I *have* heard of a William Carter, or rather Bill Carter—"

Mrs. Slipaway murmured something about a rose by any name.

"There was a boy in the little village where Horatio—poor Horatio!—came from. His name was Bill Carter. I recall Horatio speaking of him."

"Oh!" said Mrs. Slipaway.

"But what connection Bill Carter, of those too fleeting boyhood days of the past, could have with

the vanished Horatio of the present moment, I can't imagine," observed Mr. Briggs.

"Thanks," said Mrs. Slipaway.

"May I ask if you are making any progress in your investigations, my dear Mrs. Slipaway."

"I don't know about progress," said Mrs. Slipaway, "but I'm still thinking."

"Oh!" said Johnnie. "By the way, what was the name of the little village Horatio came from?"

"Blinkum," said Mrs. Slipaway.

"Blink—?" said Johnnie, not quite catching it.

"'Um!" said Mrs. Slipaway.

## CHAPTER X

MR. SLIPAWAY sat on a grass-plot and gazed with a mournful and solemn expression at a wreath on a mound. The shadow of a weeping willow fell upon him and it was an appropriate shadow for such an occasion, for Mr. Slipaway's mood was tinged with sad regrets. He had never known a mother's tender care himself; an orphan asylum had received Horatio at a very youthful age, and later he had been transplanted to the none too loving care of an aunt at Blinkum. So he had rather brought up himself, as it were, and—he had often reflected—made none too good a job of the undertaking.

Now, as Horatio sat there, he tried to think as he would think if fate had been kinder to him and he had really enjoyed those blessings of maternal solicitude which had been Bill's. Mr. Slipaway was not so well acquainted with Mrs. Carter's shortcomings as that disagreeably cynical person, the village doctor. With the willow throwing long streaks of shade over his drooping figure, Mr. Slipaway

imparted mentally a thousand virtues and as many gentle graces upon the defunct maternal authoress of Bill. His imagination roamed to heights of touching sentimentality; like a poet or an artist creating a wondrous feminine figure from a poor dull slattern, Mr. Slipaway moulded in fanciful outline everything that the subject of his thoughts should have been, and nothing that she had been.

Two or three villagers peered in on Mr. Slipaway; also a certain strange lady, that is, strange to the villagers; and a strange gentleman. The strange gentleman peered in from one corner of the cemetery, and the strange lady from another, and neither knew the other was there.

Having prolonged his vigil quite in keeping with the exigencies of the occasion, Mr. Slipaway arose. Then he went over to the wreath and extracted therefrom a simple flower, which he put in his button-hole. After which he gazed skyward, heaved a deep sigh, and, with slow steps, moved from the spot. By this time Mr. Slipaway felt quite well acquainted with the late Mrs. Carter; so well acquainted, indeed, that it was as if he had adopted her, or a certain mythical personage symbolical of all Mrs. Carter should have represented, in a maternal capacity, if she had not strayed from the

straight and narrow path of dignity and righteousness into the more tortuous and pleasing byways of bibulous irresponsibility and joyous forgetfulness.

As Mr. Slipaway left the little churchyard and started down the road to the tavern, without looking to the right nor the left, the strange gentleman and the strange lady who had surveyed Horatio from nearly opposite points of vantage without the churchyard, now moved toward each other. The strange gentleman rounded a corner, and, walking briskly, came almost upon the strange lady stepping from behind a thick barrier of shrubbery.

"Mrs. S—"

"Mr. B—"

They exclaimed simultaneously. For a moment they stared at each other. The lady was the first partly to recover herself.

"Well, goodness gracious!" she observed.

"Well, I'm hanged!" said Johnnie.

"How'd you come here?"

"I might ask that question, too."

They both eyed the departing figure.

"I got thinking about Blinkum," said Johnnie.  
"Poor Horatio—I remembered he was born there."

"And you came for sentiment?" said Mrs. Slipaway grimly.

A faint grin swept Johnnie's face. "Something like that," he said sheepishly.

"Mr. Briggs," said Mrs. Slipaway, "you're holding back something."

"Me?" said Johnnie guiltily, thinking of how Horatio had made that fortune for the millionaire customer and thereby probably incurred his eternal gratitude. "Me?" repeated Johnnie. "I don't know a thing I haven't confided to you."

"I'm not so sure," said Mrs. Slipaway, shaking her head. "Why didn't you tell me you were coming down here?"

"Well, you see, I had a theory," said Johnnie.

"The point is," said Mrs. Slipaway, "is it merely a chance resemblance?"

"He parts his hair different," observed Johnnie dreamily. "I noticed when he took his hat off as he sat by the little mound."

"You mean when he wiped his eyes," said Mrs. Slipaway in casual, emotionless tones. "Yes; Horatio used to part his hair in the middle. Mr. Carter pushes his back like a pompadour. Makes him look kind of piratical."

"Mr. Carter's growing something that might be a luxuriant mustache some day," observed Johnnie.

"Some day," assented Mrs. Slipaway.

"They wear mustaches down in South America," murmured Johnnie.

"Maybe he forgot to bring his with him," replied the lady musingly. "Some people are so forgetful."

Johnnie shot her a sharp look; her calmness was miraculous; she seemed moving in a world of placid unconcern. Johnnie did not understand; logically, she should have been raging and tearing around, on destruction bent. He had always understood that a woman deceived, or wronged, or thinking herself wronged—which was the same thing—was like a Kansas cyclone; Mrs. Slipaway appeared as tranquil as a summer day.

"I remember Horatio speaking of Bill Carter, but I don't recall his saying they looked almost as alike as two peas," remarked Johnnie cautiously.

"Maybe they grew to look alike," remarked Mrs. Slipaway, with a far-off look. "Maybe they weren't so much alike when they were little boys together."

"That's so," said Johnnie, bestowing on her a look of admiration for her acumen. "I never thought of that."

"The question is," said Mrs. Slipaway, "does he merely imagine it, or—is it pretense?"

"Great heavens!" said Johnnie, as if the full force of her words assailed him like a shock.

"Don't act so surprised," said Mrs. Slipaway, eying him sharply. "Another question is: If it isn't—ahem!—pretense, or duplicity—wouldn't it be dangerous to—to try to—well, wake him up? If he really thinks it"—Johnnie coughed—"why, he's like a sleep-walker, isn't he?"

"Something like," said Johnnie hoarsely.

"And I've heard it's awful dangerous to wake them up," went on Mrs. Slipaway tranquilly. "Gives them too great a start; stops the heart, or causes apoplexy! I knew of a sleep-walking woman once they woke up, and she never was the same, and ultimately she died of it."

Johnnie gazed at her with rapt attention. "What is the treatment?" he observed.

"Let 'em walk it off," said the lady. Johnnie swallowed; he opened his mouth to say something, but thought better of it and was silent. "Then they come to, of their own account, and don't know what they've been doing or where they've been gallivanting."

Mr. Briggs looked down. There were depths to Mrs. Slipaway—great depths. He wanted to speak, but felt he might "put his foot in it"; better reserve and silence on his part, and that sympathetic helpful attitude.

"You got to give sleep-walkers, and people like that—"

"Momentarily *irresponsible*," breathed Johnnie.

"—room to move around in. You mustn't bump into 'em, or place barriers in front of them for them to fall over. Let them roam a while! And by and by nature steps in—"

"Ah, nature is a great physician," said Johnnie fervently. He felt as if he were walking on a narrow plank. Only platitudes from him!

"But, of course, that may all be based on a false theory. Horatio may have been very fond of Mr. Carter as a boy, and that may be the reason they grew to look so alike." Sweetly. "What do you think, Mr. Briggs?"

"I—I don't think," stammered Johnnie. These were deep waters. "Is there—anything I can do—to be of assistance?" he managed to stammer.

"We might have a bite to eat, and then you could put me on the train," said Mrs. Slipaway. "I feel that I have accomplished all that is to be done here at present."

Mr. Briggs gallantly professed himself entirely at the lady's service. The tavern was about the only place where they could hope to satisfy those cravings of hunger which the anxieties of the day had

failed to stifle in Mrs. Slipaway, and thither Johnnie, in knightly fashion, escorted the good lady.

"Mr. John Briggs," he wrote on the register. And, beneath it, "Mrs. Horatio Slipaway."

Meanwhile Mr. Slipaway—or the reincarnation of Bill—had sauntered from the churchyard to the house where Mr. Carter was born.

"Pardon me, madam," he said to a woman hanging out the wash, "but may I look at it?"

"Phat?" she said, with foreign accent.

"The old, old home," said Mr. Carter, quite aware that several neighbors were watching him.

"It's old enough," she retorted coarsely. "It's so old it leaks like a sieve. Roof's full of holes." As she spoke she hung up a suit of underwear quite in harmony with the roof in one respect.

But "holes" did not assuage Mr. Carter's interest in the antique shack. "How many times have I thought of it?" he observed. "Its simple outlines—its homely contour! Though since those days my footsteps may have moved in palaces in far-off climes!"

"Phat the—" began the woman.

"This very gate—how many times have I swung

on it when a boy? I wonder if now, for the sake of 'auld lang syne,' I might venture—"

"Don't do that. If you do I'll have the police after you for breaking down the gate."

"Have you no sentiment?" said Horatio reproachfully.

"I have me washing to do."

"I was born in this house," said Horatio.

"Yez showed mighty poor taste."

"Madam, home is where the heart is," said Horatio with a courtly bow.

"Home is where the washtub is, you mane."

"Have you no poetry in your soul?"

"I have me washing to put out." As she spoke she adjusted a pair of pulchritudinous stockings, which, filled by the wanton breeze, flaunted themselves with the shameless abandon of the fat lady in a burlesque show.

Horatio gazed modestly the other way. "How many times have I tied a string to my big toe and hung it out of that window," he murmured.

"See here," she said, with arms akimbo. "Phat you mane, talking about your big toe to a lady? If you think I'll be standing your insults—"

"Insults, madam?" said Horatio gently.

"When a strange gentleman starts to talk about ano-tomy to a lady—"

"I was only a little boy then, madam," said Horatio hastily. "Perhaps you have a little boy—"

Her face relaxed. She adjusted a pair of stockings all out at the toes.

"Ha, ha!" said Horatio.

She thrust a finger through, where a big toe would have protruded.

"Ha, ha!" said Horatio once more, idiotically.

"It's little devils they are," she said gently.

"Does *he* tie a string to his big toe?"

"He does that," she said grimly. "And when he gets caught, he—"

"Same old big toe—same old string—same old swimming-hole!" laughed Horatio, and departed gaily. By this time he began to feel himself quite an expert Ananias; but when you've become a reincarnation you might just as well be an artistic one.

At the tavern he saw the register and had a shock.

"Eh?" he exclaimed, staring at the names of Mrs. Slipaway and Mr. Briggs.

"Know 'em?" said the landlord.

"I used to know an Horatio Slipaway."

"They ate together, and then they left," said the landlord.

"Ha!" said Horatio. He knew Mrs. Slipaway a woman of unimpeachable rectitude, but what a damaging document that page of the record might prove—say in the hands of Mr. Slipaway! Only, since he was no longer Mr. Slipaway, he did not need any such weapon. For him the "pale, passionate" lady now was as not. He no longer feared her. But Mrs. Slipaway!— *And* Johnnie Briggs!— Together—on his trail?— No wonder Horatio said "Ha!" and prepared to gird his loins. They might possibly prove his body once to have belonged to Horatio Slipaway; but his mind—his free, untrammelled mind—that was Bill's. The thought revived him. He squared his shoulders, while new visions assailed him—visions of the future! The world was his oyster; now that he had made his little pilgrimage he would embark on larger undertakings. He would show the world what Bill Carter could do. He would "tackle" the oyster; insert a knife deftly; open the bivalve, and find therein a treasure—a great big pearl. Mr. Slipaway half closed his eyes.

Other men found the pearl; why shouldn't he? Fortune beckoned him—and he was not afraid. The reincarnation of Bill would have "tackled" the original Chinese dragon—let alone a bivalve. Figuratively Bill got out his knife. Now for the golden

adventure! His thoughts were interrupted by a sound of martial music.

"It's the town band," said the landlord.

"Indeed? Not bad," said "Bill" absently.

"Yes; there's five of 'em, and they do make quite a noise."

"What's the cause?" said the guest.

"You," said the landlord.

"Eh?"

"It's a kind of welcome home. They've come to serenade you."

The reincarnation of Bill swelled.

"Maybe you'll make 'em a little speech from the veranda?"

"You bet I will," said "Bill." "I'll talk to them like a Dutch uncle. Why, this—this is the proudest day of my life."

And he did talk to them. People afterward said his silver-tongued effort would have made even the great Wm. J. turn green with envy. Mr. Slipaway — that had been — surprised himself; he had never dreamed he had in him the makings of a great orator. Pathos, bathos, tragedy, comedy—were all one to him. The more he used his verbal wings the greater became his confidence. Why, that was all he had ever needed to be an orator—con-

fidence. He'd been an unconscious orator all these years. He might have been governor of the state if he'd known it sooner. Blinkum said it was a proud day. And Blinkum dubbed Bill Carter her "favorite son," and a few local orators, including the undertaker, had their "spout," after which Bill asked all the crowd in to have a drink.

Altogether it was rather a festal occasion—the homecoming of Bill Carter! The only cloud to mar the eventful happenings of the celebration was the announcement that he was leaving so soon. But the little village reconciled itself to this sad fact with the proud realization that a man of Bill's caliber needed plenty of elbow-room. The wide world itself was about the kind of a pasture necessary for him to browse in. Anything smaller would make such an intellectual giant feel as if he were sitting in a straight-jacket. Only when the women brought their babies to be kissed did Bill shrink; there are limits to the condescensions of the great. But he gallantly offered to kiss all the best-looking mothers, and let it go at that. Altogether he had a bully good time, to compensate him for those sad sober moments in the little old churchyard. He received a bouquet on departing, not—sweet-williams!

## CHAPTER XI

AS BILL CARTER, Horatio Slipaway was a good deal like Columbus after embarkation; he felt he simply had to go on. He didn't dare—even if he had wanted to—turn back. There might be wild seas before him, but he would have to breast them. Better the seas than a divorce court and a breach of promise suit, not to mention possible criminal proceedings instituted by his former employers. Yes; best he should be lost to the world as Horatio Slipaway.

But how bury Slipaway? And where? Next to the late Mrs. Carter, mother of Bill? If he only could!—right under that weeping willow! But the reincarnation of Bill could think of no way by which this most desirable consummation could be attained. Why not bury Horatio in a watery grave—a note on the bank of a little lake—an upturned boat—weary of life—one more unfortunate? But he abandoned this expedient as trite and commonplace, quite unworthy of the genius of Bill! Besides, they might drag the lake, and, finding nothing, conclude the

alleged drowning a hoax. Of course, it would be nice for Mrs. S. if he could thus dispose of the obnoxious and totally superfluous Horatio, in which event that good lady could profit by the insurance money and possess two little nest-eggs, instead of one. But unfortunately, the scheme did not seem practical, and Mr. Carter came to the reluctant conclusion that Horatio would simply have to join the considerable army of people who never are accounted for. He hated to leave Horatio like that—"up in the air," as it were; but there didn't seem anything else to be done.

Of the details of "Bill's" peregrinations and adventures the following month or two little need be said. His luck was with him from the start; there was little rhyme or reason to his exploits, but what is the use of logic when you have a talisman, or mascot, in a name? For example, who but a corsair like Bill would have walked into a bucket-shop and bought something he didn't know anything about, just because everybody said it was the worst ever, never had a show and never would? Sulphur Common; the kind of stuff a certain place is paved with; the only way to touch it was with a pitch-fork, and then not to lift it, but to jab it! So said the

boys, and Bill listened to those merry gibes with a sympathetic smile.

"Gentlemen," he said, "I feel kind of sorry for Sulphur—seems so friendless. It don't seem to belong here at all. Sort of poor waif with a forked tail everybody gives a kick to as it goes along! I haven't much of the rhino with me—just a few odd hundred dollars I was going to buy a dinner with—but it seems more charitable to bestow it upon the sulphur-and-brimstone orphan."

How little it takes to turn the tide of opinion sometimes! A few sporty spirits who thought this daring stranger must be possessed of special information on the sulphurous product fell in line. Then some one sent out a bulletin: Firm of So-and-So buying Sulphur Common. This started another little coterie going. Who the deuce is stirring up Sulphur? folks began to ask. Then some one sent out another bulletin. Ammunition factories short of sulphur. By and by the lava began to boil. Bill sold all he had and then sold some more he didn't have. Indeed, he pressed his luck. By the time the young volcano had ceased to sizzle and had settled down to its natural state of innocuous desuetude he found himself possessed of more ready money than Ho-

ratio Slipaway had ever dreamed of having for his very own.

But this didn't surprise the reincarnation of Bill in the least. He settled down to a life of ease and comfort, renting a bachelor suite in a suitable neighborhood and taking unto himself a Jap servant to look after the place and administer to his ("Bill's") creature comforts. As a little cocktail mixer Saki had no peer. Even his name suggested liquid refreshment. But before engaging the incomparable Saki, Mr. Carter had an understanding with him.

"If any one asks you how long you been with me, say six years, Saki," admonished Bill.

Saki promptly swore by all the Buddhas he would comply with this request.

"You been with me—six years—down in South America, Saki," said Bill impressively.

"What honorable part South America?" asked Saki conscientiously.

"Make it Patagonia," said Bill.

Saki wrote down the name, and for several days thereafter, at spare moments, might have been observed at the public library, studying maps, books, geographies, consular reports, shipping statistics, histories, etc., pertaining to Patagonia. The litera-

ture, poetry, public institutions, religious history, political vicissitudes, changes of governments, the habits and customs of the people, street-car statistics, or lack of statistics, its business enterprises—no information concerning the narrow strip of land so far below the equator was too great or too small for Saki. Soon he became a walking encyclopedia about Patagonia, the country and its people. And while manipulating Martinis, he imparted this information and discoursed pleasantly and informingly in his own quaint phraseology, much to the edification of Bill. In Saki he had acquired a true treasure. There were even times when Bill felt Saki was a greater artist than himself; Mr. Carter had imagination—plenty of it—but Saki went scientifically about his mission of creating a Patagonian atmosphere of the past. This he did with child-like candor and guilelessness. He knew the name of the street where his honorable employer had lived; the club he had attended; the church he was supposed to have worshiped in; the dictator he dined with frequently; the friends he knew; a few choice amours he had had with lovely ladies—

Mr. Carter almost balked at the ladies, but Saki looked so sad he let them stand, though sometimes, being at heart a modest man, so far as gay señoritas

were concerned, he inwardly blushed at the libidinous character of these flights of Saki's poetic Oriental brain. It was Saki who put Bill in business in Patagonia, trimming wool from llamas, and exporting same at enormous profits.

"Trimming llamas, eh?" chuckled Mr. Carter "Sounds good! Like shearing the lambs down on the little ol' street. Some class in llamas!"

"Yes; llamas honorable big lambs," said Saki with a child-like smile.

"Regular rams!" murmured piratical Bill, as he imbibed a perfect cocktail of Saki's exquisite handiwork.

In the haunts of "business" frequented by Mr. Carter that gentleman found his reputation perceptibly enhanced when he casually let it be known his former occupation had been trimming llamas of their wool. A gentleman capable of trimming llamas, which is a species of exaggerated lamb, was surely some little trimmer. And Bill had shown he wasn't afraid of fire and brimstone by his plunge into Sulphur.

It was about this time Johnnie Briggs happened in one of said haunts of the erstwhile Horatio—now Bill. Whether Mr. Briggs came on a little vacation or on a quest is of no moment at this moment.

He clapped his eyes on Horatio the first thing, but that gentleman had so long forgotten he was Horatio, and had become so accustomed to being Mr. Carter, that he failed to greet the appearance of Johnnie even with a start of surprise. Mr. Briggs knew one of the other men of the place—having conducted at one time a clerical correspondence with the firm of which this small up-town establishment was a branch—and in due time was introduced to one or two customers.

“Want you to meet a most interesting chap,” said Johnnie’s friend after a bit. “See that man over there?”

“Chap with the cigar in his mouth at an angle like the mustache of an unmentionable person?” queried Mr. Briggs.

“Yes; rakish-looking, isn’t he?”

“He is,” said Johnnie, remembering the once mild and unostentatious Mr. Slipaway.

“That’s Mr. Bill Carter.”

“Common name,” said Johnnie innocently.

“Nothing common about him, though. Drifted in from Patagonia—”

“Which?” observed Johnnie.

“Oh, one of those countries near the Canal,” said the man.

"Of course," said Johnnie.

"Anybody who knows geography knows where it is. But, as I was saying, he floated in, and the first thing he did was to jump into the fiery pit."

"Pit?" queried Johnnie.

"Sulphur! Did he burn his fingers? Not he!"

"Regular devil, eh?" said Johnnie, with a queer look at the seemingly unconscious Bill, who sat gazing at the board as if he saw right through the figures.

"Yes. Regular movie picture for the 'boy stood on the burning deck'—no flames could hurt him."

"I wonder," said Mr. Briggs meditatively.

"Come on over."

Mr. Briggs did.

"Meet Mr. Carter," said Johnnie's friend.

"Carter?" said Mr. Briggs, with a slight intentional emphasis.

"Of Patagonia," went on the friend.

Johnnie and Mr. Carter shook hands. The latter looked slightly bored, as if Johnnie did not, at first sight, quite measure up to the standard.

"Glad to know you," observed Mr. Briggs blithely, as if he had never set eyes on the other gentleman before.

"Thanks," said Mr. Carter languidly. "Ditto!"

As he spoke he held his cigar between his teeth at an even more offensively upward tilt; indeed, that cigar looked quite insulting at the moment.

"Mr. Carter's business is trimming llamas," said Johnnie's friend jocosely.

"What are they?" asked Mr. Briggs, who was not well versed in natural history.

"Sheep with long necks," said the other.

"So they can swallow better," said Mr. Carter, looking Johnnie full in the eye.

"Like some people," observed Johnnie pointedly. "Who'll swallow anything!"

Mr. Carter looked puzzled. "Swallow? — swallow?—" Suddenly he brightened. "Oh, you mean to ask us to swallow something—take a drink!"

And Johnnie had to buy. He did so with poor grace, for Mr. Briggs was a most reluctant spender—one of the species who always has to hurry away, or catch a train, or meet his mother-in-law, when his turn comes. Mr. Carter ordered the most expensive concoction; Mr. Briggs ground his teeth. He gritted them harder when Mr. Carter said to the man behind: "The real imported ingredients, please. No imitation goods for me!"

"You don't like anything *imitation*?" said Mr. Briggs through his teeth.

"I do not," said Mr. Carter. "Only the simon-pure genuine goods for me! When I order a champagne cocktail I like the bursting bubbles of la belle France. The real thing! I want everything real—"

"Real men—" observed Johnnie.

"Of course! About the only kind we have down in Patagonia! That open-air life—"

"Trimming llamas!" sotto voce, with a slight sneer from Johnnie.

"—goes to make *real* men," went on Mr. Carter. "I don't want to brag, but we certainly do have the real, regular, eighteen-carat straight goods in the male man line down our way. Not a make-believe one in the whole lot!"

Mr. Briggs swallowed with difficulty. "Where is Patagonia?" he asked, taking a new tack.

"Near the Canal, of course," volunteered Johnnie's friend.

"It is *not*," said Mr. Carter. And he proceeded to exude all manner of geographical information, gleaned from the industrious and indefatigable Saki. He knew all about the rivers and the shores, the harbors and the channels, and the straits and peninsulas; the maritime history of the waters; the adventures of the mariners of the past, in this interesting part of the world, and so on. Much of all this he had

almost unconsciously absorbed from the quaintly voluble Saki while the latter was tying his employer's shoes or adjusting his shirt-studs, and now it welled forth from "Bill" in a trickling and enlightening stream.

"Like a regular travelog, isn't it?" said Johnnie's friend admiringly.

"Oh, travelogs are made to order," observed Mr. Briggs in a nasty tone.

"That's so! When Mr. Carter talks, you know it's the real thing!"

Johnnie curled his lip.

"Why, half those travelog fellows take their talks from the encyclopedias, I believe," said Mr. Briggs' friend. "But you can always tell."

"Always?" said Johnnie.

"You bet! The Chinese have a proverb: One seeing is better than reading about anything twelve times."

"In other words, you got to have *been there*," observed Mr. Carter placidly. "Actual experience!"

Johnnie swallowed some of "his" the wrong way.

"Don't lose any of it," said the sedulous Mr. Carter.

"I'll try not to," returned Mr. Briggs, glaring.

"Just think of all those long necks going to waste!" remarked Mr. Carter dreamily.

"Whose?" said Johnnie's friend.

"Llamas'!" said Mr. Carter.

Mr. Briggs, murmuring an excuse, started to leave the place weakly.

"Going so soon?" murmured Mr. Carter. "Well, when you drift around again, drop in." And he handed Johnnie a card.

"Sure; Mr. Carter will give us a party, Johnnie," said Mr. Briggs' friend.

"That's very kind of him," remarked Johnnie stiffly.

"No trouble," said Mr. Carter. "I like company—real people, you know!"

"He means the kind without frills or affectation," volunteered Mr. Briggs' friend.

"Sure; a chap you can look in the eye and know he's just what he seems!"

"Look out for Johnnie, then," observed the friend of that gentleman. "He's full of duplicity."

"Is he?" said Mr. Carter, rather severely. "Never mind!" Generously. "Friend of yours, friend of mine!" To Johnnie's friend. "Bring him around. I got a Jap boy who certainly knows how to mix

them. Trained him myself! He was six years with me in Patagonia."

"Only six?" mumbled Johnnie faintly.

"Maybe going on seven."

Mr. Briggs fumbled for a watch. "Good gracious!" he exclaimed, as if reminded of something very important. "Excuse me!" And fled.

But as he left he seemed to hear Mr. Carter's voice rambling on about llamas and "real men." A determination to square accounts fairly burned in Mr. Briggs' brain. But how? Johnnie thought and thought.

## CHAPTER XII

MRS. SLIPAWAY listened to Johnnie Briggs' recital with interest, but no evidence of excitement. She remarked it was rather strange he should be so well informed about Patagonia, if he hadn't been there, and when Johnnie somewhat heatedly explained his views, she shook her head. Mr. Briggs was too much for rushing to conclusions; Mrs. Slipaway did not believe in too hasty deductions. At least, she believed in seeing and thinking for herself. She examined her theories carefully and weighed them. If Mr. Slipaway really and truly believed he was Mr. Carter, his conduct in one or two respects revealed slight inconsistencies. His actual knowledge of South American affairs—especially his dazzling familiarity with matters Patagonian—pointed to premeditated preparations for his new part. Of course, a bump on the head may produce many strange results, but how could a bump bring in its train a fund of new knowledge concerning a place and conditions en-

tirely without the ken of the victim of the bump before said bump was inflicted?

The question arose: Is a bump an educator? Could you, for example, fall off a house, in complete ignorance of intimate little details about Liberia, and wake up to find yourself a full-fledged edition of "Things Liberian," just because you might imagine you had once lived there? Of course people used to believe that a good thumping and education often went together, but that was different. If people could get wise, and accumulate useful knowledge, by getting a bump, a person might, by that same theory, acquire a college education by falling off a house. Thus Mrs. Slipaway argued with herself. She did not believe there was any such easy road to learning. You've got to pick up education by more toilsome means. At the same time, it was not like Horatio studiously to acquire knowledge; that gentleman had liked to glide through life, unworried by the musty pages of books and statistics. That he could have deliberately and with malice aforethought, done so now, seemed to the shrewd lady just a bit out of character.

She had not yet come in contact with Saki; hence there was an important detail missing in the pros and cons of the good lady's mental processes. Mrs.

Slipaway felt there was something wanting—some undiscovered stepping-stone in the logical trend of her reasoning—but she couldn't put her finger, or her foot, on the stepping-stone. However, she was by nature patient, and would proceed slowly but surely. Johnnie was more impatient; he wanted to get hold of that nest-egg, right off; if he could have had his way, he'd have seen Mrs. Slipaway divorced to-day, and remarried (to him) to-morrow. Mr. Briggs couldn't understand Mrs. Slipaway's irritating calmness under these trying circumstances; he tried by subtle means to arouse her to fiery action, but Mrs. Slipaway insisted upon plodding along in her own sweetly annoying manner.

"You say he's making a lot of money?" said Mrs. Slipaway.

"Yes; he took a plunge in fire-and-brimstone, or something like that," muttered Johnnie, discontentedly.

"That doesn't sound like Horatio. He couldn't make money at anything. Just plug along!"

"Well, you should see Horatio now," said Mr. Briggs, with a slight sneer. "Looks like Captain Kidd, come back, and sitting on his treasure-chest! Takes a plunge in sulphur and comes out as if he were asbestos."

"I suppose he's forgotten all about the house-organ, and the little old home, with the mottoes on the wall?" murmured Mrs. Slipaway, rather wistfully.

"The only mottoes he'd care for would be: Make Every Prisoner Walk the Plank, or Swing 'Em at the Yard-arm," said Mr. Briggs, viciously.

"Sounds rather picturesque," observed Mrs. Slipaway slowly.

"You don't mean to say you approve?" began the horrified Mr. Briggs.

"I can't believe it, hardly. Horatio, looking like a pirate!"

"He sat there, smoking a cigar and looking as if he were saying: Everybody be d—. You know!"

Mrs. Slipaway shook her head slowly once more. "Doesn't seem possible it could be Horatio."

Mr. Briggs gulped. He was almost on the point of confessing he had been with Mr. Slipaway on that memorable day when Horatio had met with his little accident; but the same motives that had impelled Johnnie to silence then now also closed his lips. He had wished to give Mr. Slipaway all the leeway he wished in that self-devastating rôle he had assumed; if he (Johnnie) had told all he knew in the beginning, Mrs. Slipaway might simply have

had Horatio detained somewhere in some nice little sanatorium, and after a few days he would have been discharged, cured. As it was, look at the lengths to which Horatio had gone, already; and look at what new depths he would probably plunge!

Besides, if Johnnie told all he knew now, Mrs. S. might ask why he had not revealed these important facts sooner, and Mr. Briggs did not know just how he could answer that question, with credit to himself. He wanted to rise, not sink, in the estimation of the lady; he must continue to seem to help her most disinterestedly, but sometimes he inwardly anathematized her prudence and caution. Why couldn't she fly around more, or "off the handle," with Johnnie in the sedulous and platonic part of friend, murmuring "Calm yourself." Why couldn't she be spirited and big and emotional—with fire in her eyes—ready to stride up and down—with Johnnie at her elbow, a strong masculine antidote to her hysterical feminine emotion? Mr. Briggs felt he was being robbed of something. He strove for ways and means to infuse a little more life into the proceedings. The trouble was, he wanted to be both villain and hero, at the same time, and he didn't always differentiate exactly when he was one and when he was the other. Probably he didn't know

himself. But then, even the world itself sometimes mixes up one with the other and calls a villain a hero, and vice versa.

"You say he gave you his calling-card, with his address on it?" continued Mrs. Slipaway.

"Yes; here it is." And Johnnie handed over the bit of pasteboard to the lady.

"If he was pretending, would he have had the—ah—effrontery to hand you his card and address like that?" mused Mrs. Slipaway.

"He'd have the nerve for anything," answered Mr. Briggs. "A chap that eats sulphur—"

"Sounds sinful," murmured the lady.

"Why, he could jump into—you know—and instead of being consumed, bring back a handful of blue blazes," ejaculated Johnnie virulently.

"My Horatio was as gentle as a lamb."

Mr. Briggs coughed discreetly. Far be it from him to remind the good lady of certain delinquencies of Horatio: his most unlamb-like conduct with a "pale, passionate" female typist, etc.

"He's more like a llama now," muttered Johnnie.

"I looked up that animal," said Mrs. Slipaway. "Isn't it a funny beast? Looks as if part of it had forgot itself and went on growing, while the rest of it stood still! I am sure Mr. Slipaway never

heard of the creature, or at least, he wouldn't know enough about it to capitalize it! In which case, how can Mr. Carter be Mr. Slipaway? He would never dream of studying up all those things you told me about, either. I can understand his getting started on something and not knowing just how to stop—kind of perpetual motion—just got to keep on, as Mr. Carter—but I can't understand this elaborate education he must have taken infinite pains to acquire. He's gone at it, just like a lawyer, building up a case that isn't so, and Horatio never had the patience to be a lawyer."

"Look how he acted at Blinkum," put in Johnnie. "The pains he took to—"

"That was just acting. It was fun—for *him*! But this—this suggests work—lots of it!"

"Whole town's ringing with his praises," grumbled Johnnie. "Called him a Cicero." Disgusted.

"I never knew it was in Horatio," murmured Mrs. Slipaway. "To sway the multitudes." Dreamily.

"Bamboozle 'em, you mean," said Johnnie. "Disgraceful performance, I should call it!"

"Now I wonder what would happen if—?" the good lady suddenly stopped.

"What?" said Johnnie.

"Nothing much. I've been thinking—that's all."

Mr. Briggs gazed at her expectantly. "When I think how he's injured you—" he murmured.

"Ha, ha!" said Mrs. Slipaway unexpectedly.

"Meaning—?" asked Johnnie.

"Nothing! Only you might leave that card with me, Johnnie."

"All right," said Mr. Briggs, much mystified. "When I think of what he deserves—"

"Don't worry," said the other. Did she mean: "Dear Horatio will get his?"

Johnnie had a good deal of confidence in Mrs. Slipaway's executive ability, but he felt hurt she did not take him right into her confidence. So it was that he arose rather stiffly, murmuring something about a woman needing a staff to lean upon and making a great mistake in not utilizing said moral prop, especially when it was near at hand, but Mrs. Slipaway seemed to miss the purport of Mr. Briggs' reproachful intimation, or invitation, merely remarking casually, *did* he have to go, in a tone which left Johnnie no excuse for dallying any longer, at present.

So Mr. Briggs left, promising to look in again, soon; after all, the lady was no doubt right; a little prudence—off with the old, before on with the new!—Yes, yes; one had to remember the proprieties—

only Mr. Briggs himself experienced an ardent precipitancy; in fact, his precipitancy was so precipitate, as almost to verge on the improper. Johnnie reflected that daily Mr. Carter was fortifying his position as Mr. Carter, and that, too, if something didn't happen, he would stand on an impregnable pedestal—an heroic and life-size figure of Patagonian Bill. In a measure, Johnnie had himself assisted in the creation of that picturesque personality; therefore it seemed now his duty to devise ways and means to push the impostor from his pedestal, and cast him to the dust.

But how? Several crude ways of bringing about this result occurred to Mr. Briggs; he dismissed them. He wished to accomplish his purpose with finesse and art; to meet subtlety with subtlety; to match the Briggs brain against that of Slipaway! Bill's star was in the ascendent, but wait!—Mr. Briggs cogitated and pondered darkly. He wanted to scheme and devise; then he sighed and went to bed. Maybe the solution would occur to him later. And when it did, what a pitiable figure he would make of the llama-trimmer—that big sulphur king—that bombastic piratical humbug!—Johnnie wouldn't just wipe his feet on him? Oh, no! He just loved his old friend Horatio!

## CHAPTER XIII

MRS. SLIPAWAY and the Reverend Nehemiah Bodkins descended from the train. The lady looked bright and cheery and the reverend gentleman seemed in a sprightly mood. Mrs. Slipaway had donned a new gown which fitted her naturally excellent figure very well, indeed; she had purchased a new hat; her dark hair was brushed back becomingly from her broad brow, and her feet looked trim and neat in a pair of high-heeled shoes. Thus newly accoutered and caparisoned, Mrs. Slipaway presented a prepossessing tout ensemble. Indeed, the masculine fancy that inclines more to the rose at its full than to the namby-pamby bud that hides its shrinking beauty in maiden bashfulness, would have nodded mental approval of the comparatively modish and renovated lady. Alas, be it said, Mrs. Slipaway had fallen from grace.

She had encroached upon the sacred nest-egg. She had nibbled at the edges of that tender memorial. What was the use of having money, she told herself, if you didn't ever spend any of it?

Was it the voice of the World ; the insidious hissing tongue of that serpent, Vanity, which ever lies in wait for the opportunity to breathe its sibilant lisps into the ear of all the fair sisters of Eve, of the garden? Not that Mrs. Slipaway really plunged into the mad vortex of fashion and extravagance ; she merely was moved suddenly, almost unaccountably (save on the theory of the serpent) to “perk up a bit.” Did the reverend gentleman approve of these backslidings of his fair parishioner? Did he show a shocked countenance, or otherwise reveal evidence of inward perturbation, as he became cognizant of these reprehensible and worldly innovations? He did not.

He might thunder on Sunday against the pernicious tendencies of fashion and the frivolous silliness of its frail votaries, but six days of the week he did not mind gazing covertly—not too boldly—upon a woman properly caparisoned for the most part for the avowed purpose of catching the masculine eye. Probably an analysis of Mrs. Slipaway’s purpose might not reveal this precise motive ; indeed, an exact analysis of her reasons for doing this and that, at this period of her existence must be, necessarily, rather vague. Surely she would not bestow an extra touch or two upon her toilet for any co-

quettish reasons appertaining to Johnnie—or the minister—who, then?—

It is to be hoped these fugitive improvements were not directed against the picturesque and piratical Mr. Carter. And yet Mrs. Slipaway—chaperoned by the minister—for appearance's sake—did wend her way, at once—directly—upon her arrival in town, to the lair of the devotee of sulphur. She found the apartment-house by the number on the bit of pasteboard, and went right up in the elevator to Mr. Carter's luxurious suite. Saki received them.

"We're looking for—for Mr. Slipaway," said the minister, who had received his cue from Mrs. Slipaway. As he spoke, he gazed with ministerial severity upon Saki. Are you converted? his gaze seemed to say. For the moment, his mind drifted from his present mission. Saki smiled blandly.

"Slip—? Slip—?" he said. "No Honorable Slip here! This home—Honorable William Carter."

"A rose as sweet—" began Mrs. Slipaway and paused. "Carter?" she said. "That's strange! I understood Mr. Slipaway occupied this suite."

Saki shook his head; also, he eyed his visitors suspiciously. "This happy home, Honorable William Carter," he reaffirmed.

"Perhaps that's only his nom de plume," said

Mrs. Slipaway sweetly. "But I should like to see this—ah!—Mr. *Carter*!"

"Yes; we'd like to see him," said the minister. "In fact we have important business with him."

"Very," observed the lady, compressing her lips.

"Honorable Master not home," said Saki.

"Where is he?"

"Hot Place," said Saki a bit sullenly.

"Hot Place?" said the minister, looking slightly shocked.

"Johnnie said he was a regular sulphur king," put in Mrs. Slipaway dreamily.

"Honorable Master go out when night was young," said Saki doggedly. "He go to damn' Hot Place."

"Oh!" said the minister.

"Can he mean—Turkish bath?" murmured Mrs. Slipaway.

Saki nodded—still sullenly. He didn't like these callers; some subtle Oriental instinct told him their visit forebode trouble to his master, and with Saki, loyalty was a religion. He was made of that stuff the forty Romans were composed of. "Honorable Master go out when night was young," he repeated. "He have infant-paralysis."

"Paralysis?" repeated the callers, bewildered.

Saki resentfully reiterated the information.

"I have heard," said Mrs. Slipaway, in a deep voice, "when the slaves of the wine-cup have imbibed not wisely, but too well, they are spoken of as being 'paralyzed.' Can this be the kind of paralysis Mr. Carter was suffering from, when he departed for the Turkish bath?"

Saki again nodded.

"He may be expected to return shortly?" said the minister, concealing his disapproval as best he might.

"Maybe," said Saki.

"We will wait," said the lady.

Saki frowned. He seemed about to protest when the lady walked in, followed by her chaperon.

"Ah, a luxurious apartment!" observed the latter, gazing around a lavishly furnished sitting-room.

"Full of bric-à-brac!" observed Mrs. Slipaway, eyeing ominously sundry Venuses, Hebes and Aphrodites, disporting themselves in bronze after the elegant fashion of those attractive ladies of antiquity.

"Mr. Carter appears to be a connoisseur," observed the chaperon.

"He does," said Mrs. Slipaway.

"Have we been wise in coming?" said the other, gazing dubiously at a table, whereon reclined an empty bottle.

"You mean, in the event of Mr. Carter's not proving to be—?"

"Quite so."

Mrs. Slipaway gazed at Saki. "You been working for Mr. Carter about a month, or so?" she said. Now she was going to get at the truth.

Saki opened his innocent and guileless eyes. "Six—most seven years," he observed. "Me work for Mr. Carter in Patagonia. Mr. Carter, honorable merchant—he have big ranch—ten—twenty thousand llamas—"

"What is a llama?"

Saki described it.

"What are its habits?"

Saki gave a long dissertation of the animal in question. In fact he was replete with intricate and fascinating details. Mrs. Slipaway listened with a queer look.

"What is the principal city of Patagonia?" the lady next inquired.

Saki rattled off about three pages of encyclopedia. The lady interrupted him just when he was really getting under way.

"What is the principal cathedral of the town?"

Saki answered correctly. He then entered into a history of the church in that far-away land, and as a theological authority, he shone as brightly as he did as a student of natural history.

"What are the social conditions of the country?"

As an expert observer of sociology, Saki was a prize-winner. He had all the vices and virtues and idiosyncrasies of the different classes at his tongue's end. He dribbled on and on.

"That will do," said the lady. "I have satisfied myself." Tranquilly.

"Of what?" asked the bewildered reverend gentleman.

"I have found the missing link!"

"Where?"

"There!" Pointing to Saki.

"Still I do not gather your meaning."

"I knew Horatio never could study up all those things by himself. There stands the master-brain."

"That little imp!"

At that moment Mr. William Carter walked in.

Did he start slightly? If so, he almost immediately recovered his self-possession. His position was a trying one—even for one of Bill Carter's superb assurance and aplomb. Would he have dropped

some of that assurance if Mrs. Slipaway had come there alone—if he had not felt on him the fixed and concentrated gazes of the reverend gentleman and Saki? The truth is Mr. William Carter might have lost a little of his lofty insouciance if he had happened in upon the good lady, all by herself—for had he not, as already intimated, in the past entertained for her a tremendous respect? And had it not been force of circumstances—a combination of untoward events—that had driven him from his fire-side out into the buccaneering world? Had it not been an unkind fate rather than natural inclination that had metamorphosed him into a sulphur king, llama trimmer, and what not? Who, therefor, shall say what might *not* have happened if he had been precipitated into the solitary presence of the renovated Mrs. Slipaway, instead of thus encountering that lady fairly and face-to-face, in the presence of witnesses? Even as it was, it seemed that the piratical glance of Bill did soften slightly as it traveled over the form of his fair and unexpected visitor. Then he bowed politely.

“To what am I indebted—?” he murmured with true South American courtesy.

“A little mistake—I guess that’s all,” Mrs. Slipaway murmured back in a hypnotized tone.

“Saki, did you not offer the señora a glass of

Patagonian wine?" said Bill, with a frown. "I fear, señora, my boy's manners have not improved since we left Patagonia."

"Yes; the States do have a demoralizing effect," returned Mrs. Slipaway, in that same hypnotized tone.

"We do not drink wine," said the reverend gentleman quickly.

"Oh, I don't know," said Mrs. Slipaway unexpectedly, "when it's from South America."

Bill made a gesture and Saki returned with the wine. Mrs. Slipaway examined the label. It might have come from South America.

"An excellent wine, I assure you, señora," said Bill, and at the "señora" Mrs. Slipaway looked hypnotized once more. Bill spoke with such real Spanish courtesy; he quite made Mrs. Slipaway think of a *caballero* or a *contrabandista*, or one of those gay gallant matadors that jump over bulls' horns one moment and salute the applauding multitude the next. Indeed, just for the moment, Mrs. Slipaway experienced a strange, irrational and entirely ludicrous and bizarre feeling of shyness or modesty in the presence of the complicated personality of her host. Confused, she touched her lips to the glass; of course, she had only wanted to see the

label. And as the enormity of her conduct stole over her she felt as if she, too, might almost be courting that "infant-paralysis" whereof Saki had spoken.

"Just where did we get this wine, Saki?" asked Bill.

Saki mentioned the locality, and gave a history of the wine industry of the place; where the grapes grew; how many liters of wine they made; how many were consumed locally; how many were exported.

"No wonder you don't want to part with him," said Mrs. Slipaway. "After all these years!"

"Couldn't get on without. Why, I wouldn't know how many llamas I own if Saki wasn't there to count them."

"He seems to have a marvelous memory."

"Marvelous," said Bill solemnly.

"And now," said the lady, rising, "since I didn't find him I came for I think I'll be going."

"Proud to have made your acquaintance," said the other. "May I inquire your name?"

"Mrs. Slipaway."

"Slipaway? Ah, yes." Did his tone falter just a bit? The lady gazed at him with weird fascination.

"You have never heard of it—I dare say?"

"But I have." Suddenly. "Why, I used to know an Horatio Slipaway."

"Did you?" said the lady.

"Same little village where I came from."

"Indeed?"

"Fine chap, too!" Enthusiastically.

"You think so."

"I do."

"You would," Mrs. Slipaway managed to murmur.

"So it was as a friend of Horatio you called?"

"As a friend!"

"It all comes back to me now."

"Does it?"

"Why, we ate from the same apple."

"How touching!"

"Swam in the same old swimming-hole!"

"Tender recollections of youth!" breathed the lady.

"Why, Horatio saved my life," said Bill.

"How brave!"

"Courage of a lion!" said Bill enthusiastically.

"I knew there was something missing when I went back to the old town."

"What was it?"

"Horatio."

"You expected to see him there?" Mrs. Slipaway was again speaking like a person in a mesmeric trance.

Bill did not answer directly. "You knew my dear old *amigo*, Horatio, señora?" he inquired sedulously.

"Slightly," said Mrs. Slipaway, with an accent. "Only slightly!"

"And where is he now?"

"I'm afraid I can't add to your information on that point."

"No?" said Bill.

"No," said Mrs. Slipaway, and arose, about to depart, when the door-bell rang.

Saki answered the summons.

"Does Mr. Slipaway live here?" said a voice without.

"No; this happy home of Honorable William—" began Saki, when a lady pushed right by him and came in.

## CHAPTER XIV

THE lady was tall; and there were several sharp angles in her figure, but she moved with a slidey, glidey undulation that lent a certain fascination to the angles. One felt instinctively she was full of temperament; indeed, she might have stepped out of the canvas of one of those impressionists who seek character in the ultra, rather than in the classical, or conventional, old-fashioned ideas of beauty, handed down from the academic epoch of the Parthenon. She was not a Diana, and she gloried in the fact. Every angle was a protest against the sweet, soft roundness characterizing the mythological conception of feminine loveliness. In fact, she was up-to-date. Not that she was "scrawney"; oh, no! Just temperamentally thin! She was pale—"passion-pale"; also there was a freckle or two on her nose; those freckles were rather interesting—little flecks against a field of white. Her eyes held an unsatisfied expression—that might have been crudely interpreted—by the unsophisticated Horatio—as indicative of "hunger." Her lips were

like a reddish splash; a sentimental gentleman might find pleasure in feeding them bon-bons, or liquid refreshment that sparkles. She was dressed fairly well, and carried herself like a lady who had a grudge against the world—or some one in it!

Did Bill quail at the sight of this vision? Not at all! After the first shock of her entrance, his eyes expressed a questioning, courteous pleasure. Mrs. Slipaway examined the newcomer, with cold appraising calculation. Perhaps she divined at once who she was; also, a quick suspicion may have shot through her brain; if so, it was quickly dispelled by Mr. William Carter's manner. The latter still gazed upon the fair visitor as if she was a stranger—not an unwelcome one—nor a welcome one—just a stranger! He smiled upon her.

"A chair for the señorita, Saki," he observed, with a wave of his hand.

"Señorita?" ejaculated the visitor, and the freckles quivered on her nose. Bill gazed at them interestedly.

"*Caraccas!*" muttered Saki, as protesting against the visitor's unladylike manner of thus forcing her way in.

Whereupon Patagonian Bill wheeled upon him, quickly, and said something sharply and disapprov-

ingly, in Spanish. It sounded like "Montevideo"—or some other capital—cut up into syllables, with the accent in the wrong place, but Saki seemed to understand, for he bowed very deeply, and humbly enough placed the chair for the lady.

"You see," explained Bill, "my boy has not yet become accustomed to the ways of this fair and free republic. We call them republics where I come from—South America—but there's no freedom for women there. Really"—with a bold, dashing smile—"they are dynasties as far as your sex is concerned"—beaming upon the quivering, befreckled nose—"cruel dynasties! Cruel dynasties! A travesty upon freedom, I might say. Would a charming young woman dare, however innocently, enter a gentleman's rooms in one of those benighted republics, unless accompanied by a duenna? She would *not!* But here—ah!"—expansively—"it is different. Here woman is free; she goes where she pleases, does what she pleases, and says what she pleases. No speck of blame shall smirch her fair fame. You come; you go; you depart; your reputation is safe. The good *Dios* be praised."

Bill spoke with fervor; he clasped his hands. Saki beamed like a cherub; obviously, his master's words seemed inspired to him. Mrs. Slipaway listened with

polite attention; the minister, with his head cocked sidewise like a bird that wasn't quite sure what kind of a branch he was perched on. Upon the face of the typist lady—for it was she, of course—a flutter of bewilderment came and lingered; it seemed to ripple the "pale-passionate" composure.

Mr. Carter threw out his arms. "Yes; I was glad to get back—after twenty years of wandering!"

"You see, Mr. Carter's a great traveler," observed Mrs. Slipaway, tranquilly to the other lady.

The other lady did not answer. She, too, seemed as if she were momentarily hypnotized.

"Mr. Carter has a ranch and he raises llamas," went on Mrs. Slipaway. "Sometimes he trims them for their wool. And when he isn't trimming wool, he's raising blue-blazes out of sulphur."

Still the other lady sat as if unable to move. Patagonian Bill's eyes gleamed now like those of a big cobra.

"You see, Mr. Carter is a friend of a—well, an acquaintance of mine," went on Mrs. Slipaway, softly, sibilantly. "Mr. Carter is very well-known in the little village of Blinkum."

"You heard about the home-coming I had there?" cried Bill. "Whole town turned out to greet me!"

The eyelashes of the impressionistic lady moved

up and down, like the wings of an agitated moth. "Whole town?" she stammered.

Mrs. Slipaway absorbed her appraisingly. Did she place her in the class of "dangerous" women? What were Mrs. Slipaway's own thoughts at that moment? Mrs. Slipaway could probably not have analyzed them herself—they were so chaotic! Only she knew she did *not* like the impressionistic lady; that at least was a dominant emotion. Her fingernails were so long and so beautifully manicured and sharp. They looked like very "scratchy" nails.

"Whole town!" repeated Bill, with enthusiasm. "That was worth coming back for, after being gone twenty years! And they made me make a speech. Some little speech! And every one knew me at once, and clapped me on the back—good old Bill Carter—"

The typist lady seemed to relax a little in her chair; her attitude was rather limp; that mental tension which had showed itself in the expression of her face, on her entrance, seemed now to have left her. One might have labeled her now: "Passiveness," or "A Restful Moment After a Turbulent Day." She looked rather Whistlery at this particularly artistic, felicitous moment. The cobra-glance of Bill took in the picture she made with gen-

tle approval; it seemed to say, how varied are the charms and moods of woman—lovely woman! In action, she fills our minds with admiration; quiescent, she steals over our senses with tender, insidious force.

He did not ask his fair visitor her mission. In her case he showed himself a South American. Curiosity—idle curiosity—ah, that is a “Yankee” trait, and Bill, though a “Yankee” by birth, had presumably acquired true Spanish circumlocution and indirectness in his verbal dealings with people—especially the fair sex. His manner now implied it was sufficient she had called; the pleasure of her company was enough without the immediate why and wherefore of her coming. Maybe, the lady had seen him somewhere and been attracted by him, Mr. Carter’s attitude might have implied; she had shyly, but irresistibly, been drawn to his retreat; naturally she might feel a bit embarrassed at first; it was his task to make her feel at home. He smiled reassuringly.

“Will you not partake of my poor hospitality, señorita?” he asked politely. “You see, you are properly chaperoned.”

“Yes; isn’t it nice?” observed Mrs. Slipaway, in faint, far-away tones.

A small bunch of forget-me-nots on the typist's dress moved slightly.

"Some still wine?" urged Mr. Carter.

"Patagonian," murmured Mrs. Slipaway.

"More wine!" said the minister disapprovingly.

The pale, passionate face expressed a faint, mechanical negative.

"How about a glass of champagne?" said Mr. Carter blithely.

"Honorable Pop-pop?" breathed Saki expectantly.

"Gaily effervescing?" said Mr. Carter.

"Tickle-drops," murmured Saki, as anxious to be of service.

"Heathen!" said the minister, looking at Saki.

"I have a rather good vintage champagne," went on Mr. Carter ingratiatingly, "with which we might honor this occasion. It is an old wine. Saki calls it 'Honorable Grand Pop-pop,' indeed, in consequence of its antiquity. But though ancient, in a sense, it is still quite lively—"

Saki squirmed. Apparently he was trying to express in pantomime those vinous qualities which his master professed to find in the old but far from decrepit "Grand Pop-pops." Also, his wriggles seemed to imply the effect which the "Grand Pop-

pops" might produce upon those who partook of its ingratiating "tickle-drops."

"Little monster!" murmured the minister, coming to life once more, and eying Saki with open disapproval.

"I gotta go," said the typist suddenly.

"If the fair señorita must—?" The Honorable William Carter spread out his hands.

"Yes; I gotta go," she repeated, as coming out of a dream.

Again Mr. Carter made an eloquent gesture that seemed to say: "I am desolated"—or to that effect.

The lady strode toward the door; her movements were less glidey and slidey. Mr. Carter politely held open the door; she went out, but before she departed she gave him one swift look; then, suddenly her shoulders straightened and she walked quickly away.

"You forgot to introduce me to the lady," murmured Mrs. Slipaway. "What did you say was her name?"

But Mr. Carter was not to be caught. "I believe I forgot to ask myself," he said innocently.

Then Mrs. Slipaway went. And the minister thought it was quite time. That good gentleman had entirely lost track of what it was all about.

## CHAPTER XV

THE HONORABLE BILL had reason to feel he had emerged from the dual encounter with due credit to himself. It is possible that, had he paused for profound reflection, he might not have experienced unadulterated satisfaction at the outcome of his first interview, and he might even, in the wee sma' hours, have felt a twinge or two of conscience. But in the case of the second interview, his after emotions were of a pleasing, possibly jubilant nature. Just how the impressionistic manipulator of the typewriter had come to discover his whereabouts Bill did not know or care; sufficient he had dealt with her as she very well deserved. He now saw her only in the light of a viper who would nip the hand that had fed her—at Child's. His perfectly innocent intentions had been totally and outrageously abused, and a big crop of ingratitude was the only harvest she had planned for him in return for sundry thirty-cent vegetarian luncheons and a few other purely Platonic attentions. Hereafter any poor girl who looked hungry could die of starvation, for all of Horatio.

She had come like a serpent; she had departed like a limp rag. The reincarnation of Bill chuckled.

"I think I'll have to raise your salary, Saki," he observed.

Saki did not object.

"Or I could make you a partner in the llama-trimming business," went on "Bill."

Saki murmured something about preferring the "honorable raise," and the other, after promptly promising the same, departed, on "business" bent. Thus several days passed and the Honorable Bill continued to prosper; to Saki's salary as valet, etc., he added another stipend. The precise amount of this additional salary was determined upon by a long and honorable debate, as Saki was scrupulously particular in monetary matters and would receive only such an amount as the ethics of the situation demanded. For extra services as—what?

"Tutor," said Bill. "Private professor to the sulphur king! Kings have private tutors, don't they?"

"Professor of what?" asked Saki gravely. He wanted no sinecure; only just what he earned.

"Oh, professor of any old thing! Say—llama-anthropology!"

Saki thought that sounded dignified enough and looked pleased.

"Or professor of South American sociology—"

"And criminology—" from Saki.

"And criminology, with special reference to Patagonia."

They wrestled with that for a while; Saki liked this title, which, as he expressed it, had an honorable prolongation; but then, professor of llama-anthropology had a poignant crispness that was also appealing—so professor of llama-anthropology Saki became. There was a certain mystery about "anthropology," in reference to "llamas," that carried its own especial recommendation; it might mean anything. From that time on, when they were alone together, "Bill" called Saki "professor," and Saki began reading up on "anthropology," which he discovered was a very exhaustive subject, and most illusive in its application to "llamas." Indeed, Saki could never quite discover the connection, but he kept on reading, investigating and hoping; perseverance was his forte.

It was about this time Johnnie Briggs took a hand in the attempted unmasking of Horatio. Mr. Briggs had gleaned from Mrs. Slipaway a fragmentary report of what had happened on the occasion of that good lady's visit to the apartments of "Patagonian Bill," and Johnnie had almost frothed at the mouth

with indignation at her words, although Mrs. Slipaway had seemed very calm and thoughtful, while thus permitting Johnnie partially to glimpse the situation.

"Monstrous!" groaned Johnnie. "I don't believe another man lives who could have done that—to you!"

Mrs. Slipaway shook her head slowly.

"I never knew he had the moral courage," she breathed.

"Moral!" snorted Mr. Briggs.

"Or genius!" sighed Mrs. Slipaway.

Johnnie gazed at her with amazement and disapproval.

"I should find another word," he snapped.

"The folks at Blinkum said he swayed them with his genius," she observed.

"Blinkum!" said Johnnie sneeringly. "Little old one-horse—"

"They said people just listened and were carried away—"

"Been drinking, probably," said Mr. Briggs in a disagreeable tone.

"I can understand it," she observed.

"Oh, you can!" Johnnie stared.

"He just carried her away!"

"Who?"

"The breach of promise woman!"

"Poor girl!" breathed Johnnie fervently.

"Oh, I don't know's I'm feeling specially sorry for her," remarked Mrs. Slipaway.

"Victim of man's brutal—" breathed Mr. Briggs, as if not hearing the good lady's last words.

"She looked as if she could take care of herself—and some other people, too," observed Mrs. Slipaway.

"Good heavens!" remarked the horrified Mr. Briggs. "You're not defending him—"

"The way he sent her about her business *was* masterly," said Mrs. Slipaway in a reminiscent tone. "My! he was so polite butter wouldn't melt in his mouth. And the words she had come to speak she couldn't say. I tell you, Johnnie, *you* would have been proud of him at that moment."

Johnnie looked and looked at her. What man knows woman? "Proud of *him*!" he managed to ejaculate. "The man that deserted you—his happy home—its attendant treasures—" Mr. Briggs was thinking of the nest-egg once more. "When I think of a man who could do that, no words in the dictionary can be found to express what I would say of such a man. And when I sit here and listen to

you—you”—Mr Briggs’ voice shook—“using that adjective—that commendatory adjective—in connection with one who has sunk—sunk—to depths no depths can reach—when, I say, I listen to you—you, a paragon of your kind—neglected—abandoned—left to weep in solitude!—”

“Don’t know as I’ve shed any tears, Johnnie,” she observed tranquilly.

“That’s your fortitude,” breathed Johnnie. “Your Roman nature! Your tears are not visible; they are inward. Your pain is inward; you are like the Spartan lad who had the fox beneath his wes’-coat and who smiled and smiled through all his pain. But *I* know what you are suffering—you can’t deceive me. You can’t deceive one who understands and appreciates you as well as I do.” As he spoke Johnnie tapped his chest.

“No?” said Mrs. Slipaway softly.

“No,” said Mr. Briggs firmly. “Why, I know you better than you do yourself.”

“Do you?” said Mrs. Slipaway.

“I do,” said Johnnie. “It is time something should be done—something very emphatic!”

“If you only would, Mr. Briggs,” said Mrs. Slipaway, with suspicious meekness.

“I will. I will take it upon myself as a—friend.

There is a weakness somewhere; I will find it; I will pierce it. I will shatter his abominable alibis—his village homecoming as Bill Carter!—Blinkum! Patagonia! Huh! And when he is revealed in all his true colors—his hideous colors—then—then—” Johnnie paused.

“Then?” said Mrs. Slipaway expectantly.

Johnnie muttered something about legal proceedings, and—and—later— At this point Mrs. Slipaway shyly changed the conversation. But she wished Johnnie good luck when he departed. Mr. Briggs hinted of some plan he had in mind, but he did not say what it was, and Mrs. Slipaway did not press her inquiries in the matter. Indeed, that lady exhibited almost superhuman patience and self-control at this stage of her decidedly vivacious matrimonial adventure with Horatio. She had thought when she had married that gentleman that she could twist him around her finger—and here she was, not knowing where she was. The would-be twister had become the twistee. It was quite a new experience and certainly kept her guessing. It was better than going to a church sociable and having charades and riddles. Anyhow, Mr. Carter had the most charming manners—manners so lofty and distinguished they had

engendered in her a funny little sensation bordering on bashfulness. She would never have believed it; it was as if she had made a great voyage of discovery; fancy her never having dreamed of those polished and masterful qualities in Horatio! Of course, she would make him suffer and repent in sackcloth and ashes yet, because this was due him, and you can't dodge the retributory climax that comes with wrong-doing. Yes; Horatio would have to sit down and throw dust in his hair, the way Job did; but all the same, meanwhile, Mrs. Slipaway permitted a faint thrill of approval to permeate the innermost recesses of her being at the recollection of the superb manner in which he had received and dismissed the "passion-pale" lady in the case.

Mr. Briggs' pernicious activities in the affair were soon once more made manifest to the reincarnation of Bill. The latter gentleman had returned one afternoon from his arduous business activities in the little blackboard shop which was an adjunct of the Busiest Little Street, when he noted the face of his faithful attendant wore a sad and melancholy look. He manipulated the Martini mournfully; he produced the comfortable fireside slippers as if that duty had now become but a mechanical detail of the

daily routine; the twinkling light in his eyes had become extinguished; upon his face regret had laid its darkening shadow.

"Well, Professor," said "Bill" with customary blitheness. "Anything new? Anything stirring? Have you traced that word yet, back to its furthest derivation, and dug its deepest roots out of the remotest antiquity?"

Of course, he was referring to "anthropology," and his tone was calculated to bring an answering smile to the engaging features of the faithful Saki; but to-day that smile did not appear. Saki sighed.

"Man try to get me to tell dishonorable untruth," he bemoaned.

"Eh?" said Bill, interested at once.

"He offer me dishonorable cash."

"Ha!" said Bill.

"Which, when I spurn haughtily, he offer me more!" lamented Saki.

"Raised the ante, eh?" said Bill.

"Three times he say more!"

"Some little Oliver Twist! And what did you do?"

"With scornfulness I quote immortal line: 'Rags are royal raiment'—" said Saki with flashing glance.

"Good! What was it this insect wanted you to tell an untruth about?"

Saki breathed hard. "He want me to tell dishonorable untruth about never having been in Patagonia."

"What?" ejaculated Bill. "The scoundrel! The worm!"

"He want me to tell dishonorable untruth I enter your honorable service *here!*"

"Can you beat that?" said Bill. "And what did you do then?"

"I raise the ante," said Saki, still with flashing glance.

"How?"

"I tell dishonorable worm I serve honorable master not six, but *sixteen* years—"

"How's that?" said Bill quickly.

"In Patagonia!"

"But—see here—" The reincarnation of Bill bestirred himself on his comfortable couch. "I appreciate your loyalty, Professor; only, don't you see—why, we're committed to six years. We can't go on raising the ante indefinitely. Why, the next time, in your indignation — well founded, of course — you might say sixty years—"

Saki looked dreadfully downcast.

"That's all right, old chap, this time," said "Bill" hastily. "I wouldn't hurt your feelings for anything. And I don't blame you for raising the figures once, like that. Your—your loyalty made six seem sixteen—that is all—which I take it is most flattering to me. Mighty glad they do seem sixteen, and, on second thought, we'll *make* them sixteen, Professor. You started in my service when a very little boy—llama-trimming errand boy! Sixteen sounds like six. Any one says we said six, we'll say their hearing misconstrued the word. Get out of that easy enough. Only—with all due respect—and not wishing to put a curb on your loyalty—when dishonorable worm comes next time, don't make it sixty, or six hundred."

Saki promised faithfully.

"And now," said "Bill," "not as a reward, but just as a mark of appreciation, will you let me bestow upon you an amount equal to the last sum the invidious insect offered you?"

But Saki shook his head. "Honorable truth is its own reward," he said.

"Ha! Yes? Oh, so it is. By the way, what did this slimy apology for a human being look like?"

Saki described the tempter.

"Might have known it," said the reincarnation of Bill. "Johnnie Briggs! Well, I fancy he won't come crawling around here any more."

"I see strange man dodging on the fire-escape," said Saki. "See me, and he dodge back pretty blame' quick."

"Well, maybe he was only a burglar," observed "Bill" languidly. "Don't mind a little thing like that! And say, Professor, wouldn't you like some festivities—evening off—vacation—you work too hard—"

Saki beamed with pleasure. "Honorable master no want, I enjoy to-night wild hilarity and festivity—"

"Some roof garden, eh?"

"Public library," said Saki.

"Awh!" Bill looked disgusted. "Instead of reveling with gay 'skirts' he's going to plunge into a mad debauch with—"

"Anthropology," with gleeful anticipation.

Bill made a gesture. "Sounds like a new kind of 'booze'! All right, Professor! Go and intoxicate yourself."

Saki departed with a deep bow, but, before going, he looked carefully after the fastening of the fire-escape.

## CHAPTER XVI

MRS. SLIPAWAY'S visit to the apartment of Mr. William Carter had been productive of at least one satisfactory result from the standpoint of that good lady. She had satisfied herself, beyond doubt, that Horatio was not suffering from mental delusion, superinduced by a bump on the head, as to his identity with the Patagonian llama trimmer. Duplicity like a serpent nested in his breast and effrontery sat on his brow. With the discovery of the "missing link"—the indefatigable "professor"—to account for Horatio's abundance of encyclopedic information concerning South America, the bump-on-the-head theory, with its extraordinary mental after-afflictions and abnormalities, vanished in thin air. That Horatio had deliberately designed and plotted, set his stage, and proceeded with masterly precision in the marshaling of every detail was now satisfactorily established in her mind beyond peradventure. She arrived at the conclusion slowly but surely; she was very conscientious in her desire not to do Horatio an injustice. She wanted to be

quite fair and strictly honorable as to future proceedings. At the same time that idea of retribution—of paying the fiddler if you dance (and hadn't Horatio danced?)—had deep root in her brain.

She did not take the ever-willing Mr. Briggs into her confidence; she might use, or employ Johnnie, if he came in handy, but to reveal to that gentleman the inner workings of her brain was quite out of the question. There was, however, another she felt she might trust—one whose advice would carry weight—one who could say just what was right and proper—and what wasn't. Had he not accompanied her that memorable day when she had betaken herself to Mr. Carter's lair, and had he not comported himself on that important occasion with dignity, prudence and discretion? Indeed, he had hardly spoken a word, but the moral force of his presence had carried weight—great weight!

Mrs. Slipaway accordingly once more sought the support and aid of this reverend gentleman in her moment of feminine weakness and indecision. She found him in, and he received her in the pastoral parlor with a certain eagerness and expectancy. He was plainly glad to see her; in fact, the sight of Mrs. Slipaway promised both weird entertainment and relief from the ordinary monotony and humdrum of

his daily duties. He cocked his head. Memories of an atmosphere replete with impressionistic woman, revelry, sulphur kings, Patagonian still wine, honorable pop-pops, and a wiggling young heathen, assailed him. He drew out a chair for the good lady.

"Well, where is the wanderer to-night?" he said as airily as he could. Time enough to be lugubrious later on!

Mrs. Slipaway shook her head. "I've been thinking," she began.

"Serious thought is good for all of us," said he.

"The point inexorably settled is," she observed slowly, "he knows what he's about."

"I fear he does," said the other. And sighed.

But Mrs. Slipaway did not sigh. She went on practically: "Having got that far, it may be easier to determine what to do next," she remarked deliberately.

"So it will be," he said, but offered no suggestions.

"Of course, as I now see it, Horatio has got himself tied up into a knot and doesn't know how to untie himself. Maybe he's longing to untie himself at this blessed moment, but doesn't know how."

"No?" said the minister with slight skepticism.

"No," said Mrs. Slipaway. "He's tied the knot so tight it won't come undone. There are some knots you just give up—your fingers simply can't do anything with them—and you end by breaking the string, letting the knot be. Maybe *that's* the kind of a knot Horatio has tied himself up into. One of those hopeless kinds of knots."

"I am sure your—ahem!—knot theory is both interesting and charitable in its—ahem!—application to the subject of our conversation," said the minister cautiously.

"Maybe," observed Mrs. Slipaway pensively, "there are times when he sits there and wishes he could untie that knot."

"Maybe," said the minister, with still greater reservation in his tones.

"Sometimes, perhaps, he thinks of the little old one-time despised mottoes," pursued the lady, in the same tone.

"Hum!" said the minister.

"Maybe mottoes do have a bad effect on—on certain subjects—I mean, people," ruminated the lady. "Be that as it may, poor Horatio, what with that designing female of the species, and some other troubles Johnnie Briggs has intimated he had, didn't

hardly know what he was doing, and then came the temptation—this way out—and he took it, not seeing what it would lead to, and, as I was saying, he's got himself tied up into so many kinds of knots and double knots—with Patagonian llamas, and sulphur—"

"And heathens!"

"He's just like a prisoner tied to a stake. Can't get away! No matter how he might like to!"

"Like?" repeated the minister, with faint irony.

"Like!" said Mrs. Slipaway firmly. "I think, at heart, Horatio is a great home-body."

"The supposition does you credit, at least," observed the minister politely, recalling a vision of empty "pop-pops" and Saki's allusions to "infant-paralysis" and a certain kind of a hot place, frequented by the blithe Mr. Carter. "Great credit!"

"I have faith that Horatio, *secretly*, may be pining," continued Mrs. Slipaway.

"Eh?" said the minister.

"Pining," said Mrs. Slipaway.

"Quite so," said the other, but he added something about the divine faith of woman; how beautiful it was, and—

"The point is," interrupted Mrs. Slipaway, "how to help him untie those knots. His poor, dear fin-

gers are too weak; they are beyond him; shouldn't we help?"

"Would he — ah! — welcome assistance, think you?" observed the pastor.

"Of course he would." Promptly.

"Oh!" said the minister.

"Of course, consciously, there is a possibility he might *think* he wouldn't, but subconsciously he would surely receive our aid gladly."

"Kind of an emancipation!" remarked the other, still with a tendency to be skeptical.

"That's it! Like freeing the slaves! Horatio's a slave to Bill Carter."

"A fire-eating sulphur king!" groaned the minister. "If he had to jump into somebody's skin, why could he not, at least, have picked out somebody respectable, like a Sunday-school superintendent, or a missionary, or a—a secretary of the Y. M. C. A., or—"

"I think Horatio wanted to be somebody who would do things," murmured Mrs. Slipaway dreamily.

"Do' everybody, more like!" returned the other.

"He wanted to be a force—a power!"

The minister stared at Mrs. Slipaway incredulously.

"He was tired of being just a whipper-snapper," went on that good lady, in the same tone. "He wanted to come out of his shell—to ascend—"

"Sulphur!" muttered the minister.

"—to great heights! To show the world! And he *has* done well, hasn't he?"

"Well?" said the other.

"In a worldly sense!"

"If you call taking a plunge in fire-and-brimstone and getting away with it—doing *well*—"

"Oh, I'm not defending him," said Mrs. Slipaway quickly.

"I should think not," said the other.

"Far be it from me!"

"I am glad to hear you say that! Sin, iniquity and deception—"

"Must be punished!" said Mrs. Slipaway.

"Now we're getting back to where we should have started," said the minister. "Without punishment deception would prosper; it would reach out its tentacles; it would embrace—yes, stifle—the whole world in its clutches!"

"It would," assented Mrs. Slipaway, "and that's why we've got to 'jar' Horatio."

"Only 'jar'?" said the minister severely.

She smiled gently. "I think it might suffice, if—properly administered."

He gazed at her quickly. Her smile became knowing. The minister moved his chair a little closer.

"I've been thinking," said Mrs. Slipaway, a second time that day. "There's only one way to rescue Horatio—to save him from himself—"

"Yes?" said the other expectantly.

"The question is, would it be right?"

"Right to rescue?—to throw him a life-line?"

"I mean the means we should have to employ! The question is, could we meet deception with—well, deception? Would it be strictly moral?"

"Hum?" ruminated the pastoral adviser. "I have heard something about fighting the devil with his own weapons."

"That's so. The end would justify the means. I'm so glad you approve. I never could have gone ahead with it without your approval."

"Ahead with what?"

Mrs. Slipaway rapidly elucidated her plan.

"Then you think it will be quite moral and proper?" Mrs. Slipaway asked anxiously.

"I should say the end quite justified—"

"And you will help?"

"Hum?" Dubiously.

"What was that you said about fighting the devil with—"

"I think I can conscientiously proffer my services in the matter," said the minister slowly.

Mrs. Slipaway arose gaily. "We've got the battle as good as won!"

"Have we?" His eyes began to shine.

"We'll rescue poor Horatio—in spite of himself!"

"In spite of himself!" said the minister.

Mrs. Slipaway moved toward the front door; her step was light, and at the moment she looked quite youthful and handsome. She wore her new hat, and there wasn't a worry-line on her face. The minister regarded her with approval as he held her soft hand the fraction of a moment at parting. Quite a wonderful woman, he told himself; she seemed to thrive on trouble. So capable—and yes, so good-looking; yes, positively good-looking.

"Of course, I wouldn't like Horatio to lose *all* those new qualities he's acquired as Bill Carter," she observed. "In a way, he's found himself, and maybe I've expanded a bit, too. Maybe, we didn't quite understand each other. You got to go through a little fire sometimes, haven't you?"

"Are you referring to sulphur?" said the minister, puzzled.

"I am not," she answered, with an enigmatic smile. "I hate to do what we're going to, to Horatio, but I guess we've got to. You see, I can't let him stay away from home like that, can I? Why, think of the things that might happen to him!" At the moment her tone almost verged upon being tender.

"That probably would," observed the minister. "That most likely have!"

"A man of Horatio's character and attainments needs careful looking-after!" she murmured.

"He certainly does," said the minister.

"I mean—attention, and all that," she returned.

"You speak as if he were going to have a—*comfortable* time?" said the minister severely, even chidingly.

"Not immediately," said Mrs. Slipaway. "Not immediately!" she repeated, and tripped away.

## CHAPTER XVII

**M**R. TIMOTHY TREADWAY pondered darkly on the future and how to pay your landlady twenty-seven dollars when you haven't twenty-seven cents in your pocket. Who is this Mr. Treadway who propels himself thus abruptly, almost startlingly, in the vortex of these eventful happenings? Mr. Treadway is an actor; at present he is out of an engagement, and the prospects of being able to employ his talents, profitably, in the immediate future, are not bright. Mr. Treadway has plenty of talent, but he has a weakness; he sometimes looks upon the wine when it is red, which reprehensible and sometimes too persistent habit led certain managers to look upon Mr. Treadway with disfavor. Mr. Treadway said the world was in a conspiracy against him, while as a matter of fact he was only conspiring against himself.

While Mr. Treadway was lying in bed one fine morning and mentally seeking to multiply said twenty-seven cents by nothing and make the "answer"

twenty-seven dollars, there came a tapping at his door.

"Come in," he said, and the Reverend Nehemiah Bodkins entered.

"Mr. Treadway?" said the gentleman.

"The same," said Mr. Treadway, sitting up in bed. A faint expression of surprise rested upon Mr. Treadway's classic features. He was not used to receiving pastoral "calls."

"My name is Bodkins," said the caller, seating himself. "Reverend Nehemiah Bodkins!"

"Odds—bodkins!" Mr. Treadway murmured beneath his breath. "Haven't you made a mistake, sir?"

"No; it's quite all right," said the caller. "I have just been to what you call, I believe, an 'agency,' and I have been told you are out of an engagement."

"The information, though sad, is quite true," said Mr. Treadway. "No one regrets it, sir, more than myself. But lamentations do not alter conditions, hence I am not complaining. I am, sir, making the best of it."

"Bravely said," observed the reverend gentleman, cocking his head shrewdly at Mr. Treadway. "And allow me to add that it is the fact that you are thus unfortunately placed that has led to my calling."

"You aren't a manager in disguise?" muttered the incredulous Mr. Treadway.

"Hardly! Nevertheless, I have come to offer you an engagement. I am told your specialty is impersonations—I believe you call it. I am not exactly sure just what that implies, but it seems to—shall we say?—rather fill the bill."

"Yes, I have been very successful along that line," said Mr. Treadway modestly. "Make up before the mirror with your back to the audience, and turn around as George Washington, Honest Abe, U. S. Grant, Napoleon, and Sousa, all in quick succession!" he explained. "In the skill and rapidity of the make-up I have been considered rather at the top in that sort of thing, if I do say so myself."

"How interesting!" said the caller. "Do you think you would be as successful as an impersonator away from the—ah!—footlights, as before them?"

"Me?" said Mr. Treadway. "We don't measure our abilities by the yard-stick, in our profession. I take it, from your question, you have some moving-picture proposition to put up to me? Something in the amateur line, with a few real actors to lend it éclat?"

"Not exactly."

"I thought you implied it was an outdoors proposition?" said the puzzled Mr. Treadway.

"So I did, but there is no camera attachment."

"I don't get you," said Mr. Treadway. "You mean I just waste a lot of good stuff on the desert air?"

"Not waste," answered the caller. "You utilize your—ahem!—talents in a good cause."

"Oh, it's some garden-party stunt—I get you! Little rich girls—birthday-cake—pink lemonade—funny-man entertains the pampered pets with interesting and instructive representations of historical characters!"

"I'm afraid," said the reverend gentleman, "you don't 'get' me. This is no garden-party entertainment upon which I desire you to embark; in fact, it would hardly be called an entertainment, at all. It is more in the nature of a—solemn occasion; and should lead to sackcloth and ashes—lamentations—"

"Aren't you looking for a tragedian?" suggested Mr. Treadway. "Your plot suggests to me *Othello* or *Richard the Third*."

"The tragedy, sir," observed the caller, "is not a written one."

"No? Don't I have lines to speak?"

"You do. Lines you improvise yourself, on the inspiration of the moment!"

"Sounds good," ruminated Mr. Treadway. "I always wanted to be an author. Do I get a royalty?"

"Lump sum," said the minister.

A shadow of disappointment flitted across the visage of Mr. Treadway. "Oh, very well," he observed. "Though I should have preferred five, seven and a half, and ten of the gross."

"I fear I shall have to ask you to impersonate a very reprehensible person," said the minister. "Have you—may I ask?—ever impersonated a very reprehensible person?"

"On sundry occasions," said Mr. Treadway solemnly. "I don't know as I ever tied the hero to a railway track, or in front of a buzz-saw, but I turned my wayward daughter out-of-doors, on a wintry night, four hundred and seventeen times. The play ran that long. And every time I appeared before the curtain I was poohed and booed, in a most flattering manner."

"Dear me!" said the minister.

"Those long-run thrillers are, more or less, a thing of the past," murmured Mr. Treadway regretfully. "What's the salary?"

"One hundred dollars."

"What?" Indignantly. "Only—?"

"For one performance," said the caller, putting up a finger.

"One?" said Mr. Treadway, dazed.

"One."

"Is it as bad as that?" said Mr. Treadway mournfully.

"It is as good as that. One performance will suffice—quite!"

"Sounds as if you expected to kill your audience!" grumbled Mr. Treadway.

"Not kill," said the pastoral visitor softly. "Shock, perhaps—plant a dart or two—but not kill."

"You mean paralyze, not annihilate, the audience?" said Mr. Treadway ironically.

"Something like that."

Mr. Treadway ruminated moodily. "Why don't you hire a gunman? You don't want an actor."

"It will take both an actor and a great artist for the part," said the Reverend Mr. Bodkins impressively.

"As it sounds like murder, make it one hundred and twenty-five," said Mr. Treadway.

"One hundred and fifteen," countered the clerical visitor shrewdly.

"Oh, well!" said Mr. Treadway carelessly, "I never was one to haggle. When—how—and where—does this murder take place?"

The caller explained. Mr. Treadway listened with growing interest.

"Can I do it?" he said. "*Can* I?"

"Can you?" said the caller.

"Can me, if I can't!" he replied enigmatically.

The Reverend Mr. Bodkins looked puzzled; the horrible pun was lost upon him. He took out a roll of bills. "Half now," he observed. "The other half when—"

"The dire deed is done," said Mr. Treadway brightly.

And thereafter, for a long time, the reverend gentleman coached him. Mr. Treadway dived in his make-up box, and extracted a long black mustache. "This should do the trick," he said, and, adjusting the mustache, scowled fiercely. "How's it look?"

"I should hate to meet you on a dark night," said the minister with a smile.

"So will some one else," said Mr. Treadway.

"Well, did you engage him?" said Mrs. Slipaway later that day to the Reverend Mr. Bodkins.

"I did," said the gentleman, settling himself com-

fortably in an easy chair in that lady's home. "An excellent actor, they told me at the agency. But I had to exceed the sum we agreed upon; he demanded one hundred and twenty-five dollars; we compromised on one hundred and fifteen."

"I'm sure he's cheap at the price," said Mrs. Slipaway. "When you do something, you want to do it well. It'll be money well spent—though it does make a hole in the—ah!—"

"Sacred legacy?" suggested the minister.

"Yes. Somehow, I don't feel as if I needed that quite so much as I used to," she went on dreamily. "Not since Horatio's demonstrated he's such a money-maker. I used to think I just had to hang on to it, but that was before Horatio woke up."

"Woke up?" said the minister blankly. "I should hardly call it—"

"The fact remains, he's suddenly so full of 'pep' you can't hold him down. And that—in a monetary way—gives me such confidence—"

"Confidence—in him?" gasped the caller.

"In a monetary way!" repeated Mrs. Slipaway. "Of course! His morals must be shaken up, and he must be made to realize—"

"Of course! He *will* be made to realize," said the caller with exceeding firmness.

"Fully!" said Mrs. Slipaway, just a shade less firmly.

The caller looked around him; he was naturally very observant, and for the first time, felt something was wanting.

"One of the mottoes," said Mrs. Slipaway, reading his thoughts quickly.

"Which one?" said the caller, with a slight uplift of the brow.

" 'The Lord Will Provide,' " said Mrs. Slipaway. "When Horatio was just skimping along and didn't seem to have any gumption at all, that motto seemed helpful. Not that I don't think it would decorate fittingly any home, even now, only there did seem others that needed it more. I know it used to make Horatio rather nervous; seemed a sort of reflection on his ability, when he wasn't getting along very well. He used to stand and stare at it. So I sent it to Mrs. Flattery anonymously."

"Why Mrs. Flattery?" said the caller rather stiffly.

"Haven't you heard? Her husband is down with delirium tremens; her children have the measles, and she's broken her working arm. Poor dear, if anybody needs that motto," said Mrs. Slipaway

sympathetically, "or any stray comfort it conveys, it's she. Seemed like doing good to send it!"

"I dare say," said the minister absently.

"But speaking about Horatio," said Mrs. Slipaway, "I've been thinking."

"Indeed?" said the minister.

"There's Johnnie Briggs—he wants to be helpful, you know. He's so fond of dear Horatio and hates to see him slipping from the path of rectitude."

"Well?" said the caller expectantly.

"I'm planning to use Johnnie, too. Just a small part! I have it all figured out beautifully—just where he would fit in. And he'd just love to do it, I know—he's so fond of Horatio!"

The Reverend Mr. Bodkins regarded her admiringly. Why, she was a regular stage-manager. Pretty soon she'd have everybody playing a part.

"I'm sure Johnnie would be lonesome, if we didn't give him something to do," said the lady. And then, looking at a blank space on the wall: "I wonder if Horatio will miss it?"

"You speak with certainty of our experiment—of his returning home?" said the caller.

"Of course," said Mrs. Slipaway. "I'm sure, in the bottom of his heart, he's just longing to."

## CHAPTER XVIII

**M**R. CARTER lolled languidly on his couch of ease. He had dined excellently but not too fulsomely at a high-priced place; he had partaken of a modest pint of claret, and then gone to a "show." But the play had seemed dull, flat and profitless, to one of his active brain; why, his own life was full of more incident and variety than that piece. He could devise far more interesting situations in his daily existence than the dramatist could conceive for these people on the stage who just imagined they were in a peck of trouble all the time, while as a matter of fact, the audience knew they could straighten it all out ever so easily, if only they would. So after yawning a good deal, Mr. Carter got up and went out.

He returned to his apartments at once, and putting on a dressing-gown, lighted a cigar, stretched himself out and prepared to spend the balance of the evening engrossed in light literature of the adventuresome variety. A good smashing novel of action was especially what he yearned for—pearl-

hunting in the South Seas, or gold-seeking in the Incas—but he sought, in vain, to-night, for something up to the high standard he demanded along those lines. The story-writers, like the playwright whose work he had partly listened to, seemed to have lost the punch. Maybe Mr. Carter, whose own life was now lifted to a rather lurid plane, demanded too much of the creators of fanciful episodes. At any rate he soon found himself yawning once more. Then the last magazine he had essayed in vain to interest himself in, slipped from his fingers, and gradually he fell into a half-doze.

He dreamed he was chasing a llama up the Andes, and it was “some chase.” Up—up—he was like the youth in “Excelsior!” Now he almost had the pesky beast, and then he didn’t. “I’ll get you yet,” said Horatio—or Bill—in his dreams. It was a particularly woolly beast, the pet of his flock, and no real llama-trimmer likes to lose his choicest llamakin. But the llama turned around and seemed to grin at “Bill”; now a llama has naturally a most unprepossessing visage; in fact, its head looks like a Mistake, fastened upon a bigger Mistake, its body. It was a regular mis-fit grin—worse than a hyena’s—and it steeled the faithful shepherd to greater effort. Up—up—now they had reached the highest alti-

tudes, and Horatio—Mr. Carter—was plunging madly from peak to peak, when suddenly he missed his footing and fell—thousands and thousands of feet—landing with a crash in the rocky canyon below.

Mr. Carter sat up; likewise, he rubbed his eyes. He was sitting on the floor; he gazed around him expectantly as if thinking to behold the illusive and diabolical phantom llamakin, but instead, he beheld a man. This person stood with folded arms and was gazing at Mr. Carter, with an expression at once belligerent and puzzled.

"Hello," said Mr. Carter.

"Hello," said the man.

"I didn't expect to see *you*," went on Mr. Carter.

"No?" observed the man.

"Something else," remarked Mr. Carter. "Whew! That was some chase. I feel all tired out."

"Do you?" said the man, shooting out his chin.

"If you would only grin," observed Mr. Carter, "it—it would seem more natural—what I expected!"

"Would it?" said the man. "Well, I don't feel like grinning." His tone was ominous.

"Anyway, I'm not killed," said Mr. Carter cheerfully.

"Yet!" said the man succinctly.

If Mr. Carter heard the ominous accent his visitor imparted to the word his manner did not show it.

"Ha, ha!" he said.

"You find it funny—my being here?" said the man, putting out his chin again.

"Oh, no. I wasn't thinking about you. In fact, I was hardly noticing you."

"No," said the man, his eyes beginning to gleam.

"Did you ever see a llama grin?"

"What's that?" The man stepped forward a foot or two, menacingly.

"Llama—grin," said Mr. Carter mirthfully.

"What's the game?" said the man.

"I suppose now you're going to be tiresome," said Mr. Carter. "I yawned over a quarter of a play and fell asleep over a novel, and now I imagine I'm going to be bored with you."

"Who do you think I am?" said the man.

"Burglar—common burglar—you came in there"—pointing to the fire-escape. "All very commonplace!" he yawned. "Devilish dull night! Nothing more commonplace than a burglar. Burglar-plays; burglar-stories, galore! Fell asleep over one of them just now! Wake up"—reproachfully—"only to find *you* here."

"Oh, you won't find me so dull," said the man.

"After all I've been through," said Mr. Carter, "the vicissitudes and adventures I've had, here, and in South America, you seem trivial to me. There isn't a thrill in you."

"Isn't there?" said the man in a strange tone.

"Now if you were only a llama, and could jump over peaks—"

"What's that?" exclaimed the visitor with much fierceness.

Mr. Carter refused to be awed. He waved his hand idly. "Take them, and go," he observed. "The little Venus over there. She's a cutey, and by a top-notch artist. And there's the rest of those bric-à-brac females. Tell you the truth, I'm tired of them. They aren't what they pretend to be. Lot of humbug about art! What's the fun of looking at something that never changes her position. Sometimes I've been tempted to stand the whole lot of 'em on their heads, so's to make 'em look different. You'll find a flour-bag out in the kitchenette to cart 'em away in, if you didn't bring one along."

"Say, if you think I'm going to stand being called a llama—?" began the man with terrible aggressiveness.

Mr. Carter leaned his back against the couch and

lighted a cigar. "Oh, I didn't call you one," he observed wearily. "I only remarked, regretfully, if you only were one, which, unfortunately, you are not—"

"Seems to me," said the man, poking his face nearer Mr. Carter's, "you mean to insult me."

"Not at all," said Mr. Carter airily. "If you were a llama, I would enjoy the felicity of trimming you—as it is, the boot seems on the other leg, and it is you who are going to trim me. Go ahead! The only thing I stipulate is, you spare my young and tender life. Please"—imploringly—"don't 'biff me on the bean.'"

"Say, you got it all wrong," said the fellow. "I'll overlook your insults for the moment, pending the adjustment of more serious matters. I didn't come here because I'm a burglar."

"No?" said Mr. Carter.

"No," said the man. "I came here because you got me puzzled."

"Puzzled?" repeated Mr. Carter.

"Plumb, clean puzzled," said the man.

"You say you didn't come here as a burglar. That, at least, lifts you out of the commonplace—"

"Aw, cut it!" said the man roughly. "Do you know who I am?"

"I'm very curious."

"I'm Mr. William Carter," said the visitor.

A few moments before Horatio had been longing for a real sensation — something different — something that would lend spice and variety to the evening. He had now got rather a larger measure of new thrills than he cared for; an overdose! As a genuine thriller, Mr. William Carter (himself) was a large pill to swallow. Horatio gulped weakly; he stared at the real Bill with incredulous gaze.

The latter regarded him fiercely. "Say, mister, what's the 'lay'?"

"'Lay'?" repeated Horatio, trying to collect himself.

"'Lay'!" ejaculated real Bill. "I don't get your game—that's all. I've been some crook myself, but—"

"'Crook'?" repeated Horatio with an almost imperceptible start.

"—But this is a new one on me!" observed the visitor.

"I know it was a slight liberty, Bill," remarked Horatio, "but—" he paused. He wanted to spar for time—to think. Fancy Bill coming back like that! And at such an inauspicious time! "You stayed

away so long, Bill, why couldn't you have stayed away a little longer? And how did you—ah!—happen to know I was here?"

"Because I trailed you," said Bill in an awful tone. "When I got out of jail—"

"'Jail'?" repeated Horatio, a shiver running down his spine.

"I had a longing to go back to the old village—"

"You?" said Horatio.

"Can't even a crook have feelings?" said Bill.

"I suppose so," said Horatio. "But you don't really mean to tell me you—Bill Carter—have been in jail?"

"Sure! I don't mind telling *you*"—with a slight sneer—"a gentleman of your type!"

"How—how long were you in jail, Bill?" said Horatio.

"Oh, I've been in the cooler lots of times."

"Indeed," said Horatio. "This is rather interesting. Bill Carter—perennial jailbird! What have I done?"

"That's what I want to know," said Bill. "As I said before, you got me puzzled. I've seen some queer deals in my day, but this is the queerest."

"So you, too, went back to the old town, Bill?" said Horatio. "How odd!"

Maybe Bill had visited the old churchyard? "Did you," said Horatio, "visit *her* grave?" Hoarsely.

"I did," said Bill. "That's one of the things that took me back—the longing to place a wreath—"

"A wreath?" said Horatio in a funny tone. "Did you—ah!—do it?"

"I did *not*. When I got there some one else had preceded me. Some poison rattle-snake." Bill breathed deeply. Mr. Slipaway endeavored to appear unconcerned.

"And what did you do then, Bill?"

"The longing came over me to visit the old home."

"It did?" said Horatio in hushed tones.

"It did," said Bill.

"And you did?"

"I did," said Bill.

"How odd!" said Horatio once more. "And did you want to swing on the same old gate?"

"I did."

"And did she stop you?"

"She did," said Bill. "And then I learned some one who had called himself Bill Carter had been there before me."

"And what did you do then, Bill?"

"Nothing—then! But everywhere I went I heard people singing the praises of Bill Carter, and me

standing there like an interloper. I tell you that made me mad. Here I'd come back with kindness in my heart: probably the first time I'd had a good impulse in years. 'I will sit by her grave,' says I to myself, 'and maybe it'll make me a better man.' What happened? Ostentatious wreath!—bought by her loving son, Bill Carter, says the flower man to me. I tell you, pardner"—bitterly—"every good impulse I had turned to sour milk. I saw red. I felt like I was an outcast. Well, says I to myself, I'll act like one."

"And did you?" said Horatio.

"I did," said Bill.

"What did you do?" said Horatio.

"I robbed the old home."

"What?"

"Stole every cent there was in the place—and a few cheap gee-gaws to boot," said Bill fiercely.

"You mean to say—you stole, perhaps, from the very room where you were born?" said Horatio.

"Worse than that, pardner," said Bill. "A man tried to stop me. I beaned him. I don't think he's dead. Don't much care! Felt like an outcast, anyhow!"

"Great heavens!" said Mr. Slipaway. "And what did you do then?"

"Tapped the post-office!"

"Did you—ah!—'bean' any one there?" In awed tones.

"Naw! Just squeezed his gullet. Old fool—"

"And then you left town?"

"Not at once. I passed the parsonage. Remembered that old missionary-box—"

"Great Scott. You got it?"

"I usually get what I go after," said Bill modestly.

"I—I trust that was all," observed Mr. Slipaway weakly.

"Well, I passed the little red schoolhouse—"

"You *couldn't* carry that off."

"No; but when I saw it, and got thinking how I was an outcast, and how many whalings I had got there, as a little guy—when I got thinking of all that—"

"Yes?"

"I kept getting madder'n madder. And then it come over me how I'd do one good deed anyhow—how I'd save other little kids from all I'd suffered in the little red schoolhouse, so I—"

"Yes, yes—you—?"

"Touched a match to it!"

Mr. Slipaway ran his hands through his hair.  
"You mean, you burned it down?"

"Every sliver," said Bill. "And rejoiced to see it burning!"

Horatio groaned. "What a home-coming! And did you—ah!—visit the old swimming-pool?"

"No," said Bill.

"Heaven be praised!" said Mr. Slipaway. "You'd probably have poisoned it if you had."

"That's all very well, mister," said Bill, with the old menace in his eyes. "But now you and me has got to have a reckoning."

"A reckoning?" faltered Mr. Slipaway. What could a gentleman of the real Bill's attainments call a "reckoning"?

"What I want to know first is what kind of a graft it is? Who are you"—fiercely—"and where do I come in?"

"Don't you know me, Bill?" said Horatio, in accents that were intended to be assuaging. "Look closer."

"Seems as if I had seen you somewhere once before," ruminated the aggrieved real Bill Carter.

"Of course you have," said Horatio quickly. "Don't you remember how your dear old father—God bless his soul—while in his cups, which was nearly all the time, got us mixed up once and gave me a licking, by mistake, instead of you?"

Bill gave a great start. "Do I remember?" he said. And then—"Little Horatio Slipaway!"

"The same," said Horatio eagerly. Affairs were turning out rather better than he hoped. Maybe he could appeal to Bill's old friendship and get rid of him? Maybe Bill would consent, with a little persuasion, to obliterate himself once more? Mr. Slipaway diplomatically opened his arms.

"Hold on," said Bill Carter, holding off from that fraternal embrace. "You and me have got to have a little talk."

"Good," said Horatio. But he felt it was very bad.

## CHAPTER XIX

THE while Mr. Slipaway had endured rather than enjoyed this novel and animated little scene with his old friend Bill, his active brain had not been idle in seeking ways and means to extricate himself from the embarrassing and unexpected situation into which unkind fate had plunged him. Mr. William Carter's return brought with it a weight of problems and troubles. It had been extremely painful for Mr. Slipaway to learn that his old friend had been in durance vile; the reincarnation of Bill had thrown a glamour of respectability, even greatness, around the name of Carter; Bill had come back in person, to cast to the earth the illustrious figure which was the creation of Mr. Slipaway's genius and talent.

If he could only get rid of Bill—buy him off—have him shanghaied?—oh, for the good old days when they shanghaied men and sent them off for five years or so, into the polar regions on a whaler. Horatio would have dearly loved to consign the real Bill to latitudes near the pole—the nearer the better—and he wouldn't have shed a tear if the

real Bill had been snowed in and forever lost to civilization. What did he mean by coming back—how dared he? And with all that disreputable record. Ah, there was the rub—that record! To what great pains, with what infinite care had Mr. Slipaway gone to establish his own identity with that of—yes, a jailbird. What a fatal mistake he had made in picking out Bill for his little reincarnation-act! But—ah, blissful hope!—perhaps Bill had dropped his old name during his long career of crime. Criminals very often do.

“Have you, Bill?” he said eagerly. And breathed his hope to that person.

Bill shook his head. “I’ve always been proud of my name,” he said. “Besides, there isn’t any use trying to hide behind an alias. The ‘bulls’ always get you just the same.”

Mr. Slipaway made a slight movement. “There’s only one way out of it, Bill,” he said. “You got to go and give yourself up.”

This seemed to strike the real Bill as very funny.

“Would you get your old friend, Horatio, into trouble?” appealed that gentleman. “Why, the police would get us so mixed up, they might not be able to tell us apart.”

“Just what I was thinking,” said the unwelcome

visitor with a grin. "You certainly have gone to some trouble to prove you're Bill Carter."

"Of course, I have plenty of money and could make it an object for you to do what I want you to," pursued Horatio, taking no notice of Bill's disagreeable and suggestive last remark. "And think of what a time you could have when you got out."

"Think what a time I'd have when I got in!" observed Bill, with another annoying grin. "It's just occurred to me you've gone and established for me the best kind of an alibi."

"But"—said Horatio eagerly—"I can prove we're two people, can't I?"

"Do you want to?" said the real Bill shrewdly.

And Horatio was silent. The same reasons for his not desiring to be Horatio Slipaway still existed. No; Horatio did not wish to stir up any unpleasant inquiry. His brief return to Blinkum had been marked with rank deception; he would be held up as an impostor—if nothing worse. The situation was very perplexing; Bill gazed at him wickedly, his very glance seeming to say he felt some revenge was due him (the real Bill) and that he intended to take it. Indeed, Bill at the moment looked like Shylock whetting his knife for that pound of flesh.

"Made me feel like an interloper, didn't you?" muttered Bill. "I tell you when I went to the little old churchyard and thought of you sitting there, gazing at that wreath, I was mad."

"That was for old friendship's sake, Bill," pleaded Horatio.

"Oh, it was," sneered Bill.

"I was just thinking I was you, and how you'd feel."

"Liar!" hissed Bill, and Horatio was silent. He was becoming very uneasy. It did not occur to him to doubt Bill or his story. The Bill of his (Horatio's) juvenile days had been a small edition of this monstrous grown-up Bill. The little Bill was rampageous, eccentric and very revengeful. If some farmer had given the little Bill a wallop for stealing cherries, that little Bill would just as soon (perhaps sooner) set fire to the farmer's barn. As Horatio reviewed little Bill's past he recalled numerous pranks performed by little Bill just to be "mean." Mr. Slipaway was now seeing little Bill in a new light—in the light of the recent actions of the grown-up Bill at Blinkum—and all that early hero-worship dropped from his (Horatio's) soul. Why, little Bill had been just a mean, vicious, unscrupulous little village rat—and through all these years Horatio

had been looking up to him—wishing he had been like old Bill—a feeling of great distaste for his visitor now overwhelmed Mr. Slipaway. He felt as if there was hardly room enough in the world for the two of them.

“Were you let out of jail, Bill, or did you escape?”

“Escaped,” said Bill hoarsely.

A sudden gleam shot from Horatio’s eye.

“You see, it was like this,” said Bill, “every night, lying in my lonely cell, I got thinking of that little old churchyard, and how I’d never stood alongside of that little mound. So I made up my mind to get out, by hook or crook, and I did. Guard tried to stop me. But he wished he hadn’t!”

“What did you do to him, Bill?” said Horatio softly.

“Beaned him,” said Bill. That seemed to be his specialty, “beaning” people. “Tried to monkey with me, so I gave him one with a monkey-wrench I’d picked up in the machine-shop. Settled old scores! When I’ve got a grudge against any one”—looking at Horatio—“I always settle.”

But Mr. Slipaway was not listening; a faint smile was on his lips. A plan had suddenly occurred to him; to entertain Bill; treat him well, and then,

when old Bill was dead to the world—Mr. Slipaway glanced toward the phone. Already he could in fancy hear himself saying: "Hello, police, are you looking for an escaped convict. Well, come right over. I've got him. Yes; I'll hold him. Glad to make you a present of him. Good-by."

Animated by this amiable and friendly purpose, Mr. Slipaway rang his bell; he didn't know whether Saki had yet returned from his dissipations at the public library or not. To his satisfaction, the little "professor" answered his employer's summons. He showed no surprise at the sight of the real Bill; Mr. Slipaway frequently brought some one home with him, to help while away the weary moments, though the real Bill wore rather shabby clothes for one presumably a friend of Saki's dashing master.

"Well, did you have an hilarious time?" said Mr. Slipaway blithely to the little servitor.

"Dizzy time," answered Saki. "I chase Honorable Anthropology to his uttermost lair."

"What the—" began the real Bill, bewildered.

"Good," said Horatio. "Now listen, Saki. This is an old friend—a very old friend—a very dear old friend—I want to treat him white—to give him the best there is."

"Pop-pop?" said Saki.

"Special pop-pop! That old, old pop-pop!"

"What the—" began Bill again.

"Venerable Grand Pop-pop!" said Saki with profound deference.

"Say—what's it all about?" said Bill.

"Wait!" said Horatio.

"'Grand Pop!'" repeated Bill. "I don't want to see anybody's grand-pop. No Rip Van Winkles for me!"

"Wait," said Horatio once more. "It isn't that kind of a grand-pop. This grand-pop doesn't wear whiskers."

An hour or so later the real Bill lay on the cozy couch, snoring blissfully. Horatio stood over him, like another Brutus at Cæsar's bier. "So?—old friend?—dead?—but yesterday he might have ruled the world—now lies he there—ha!" A few bubbles were dancing in Mr. Slipaway's brain. He prodded Bill blithely with his foot. "Put one over on me, will you? I guess not." He started for the phone. "Now for the reincarnation—I mean the incarceration of Bill!" he muttered, when the door-bell rang.

"Mr. Carter live here?" said a brisk voice.

"He does," said Saki, answering the summons.

"William Carter?"

"The same."

"Then I want him."

A man in uniform pushed in.

"Eh?" said Horatio, trying to clear his brains of the bubbles, for it had been at some personal self-sacrifice he had put the redoubtable "Bill" to sleep.

"Which is Mr. William Carter?" said the man.

Saki promptly pointed to Horatio. "Mr. William Carter—Patagonia—llama-trimmer—sixteen years at—" he went through the whole formula. Too late Mr. Slipaway realized what his faithful servant was doing. His poor dazed brain was reeling.

"No, no," he muttered.

Saki thought he must mean more. He had coached and coached himself for just such an emergency. His master had partaken of a glass or two and did not quite realize what he was saying. Saki would protect him; he ran through a yard or so more of the stuff. He described their life in detail in South America; Horatio tried to stop him. He wouldn't be stopped; the faithful fellow would save his master in spite of himself. He rambled on and on, while Mr. Slipaway listened distractedly; nothing could stay the current of Saki's devoted words.

"I guess that'll about do," said the officer. And then—"Come along!" to Horatio.

"What—what for?" stammered that individual.

“Murder—arson—a few other things—that’s all.”

Mr. Slipaway was too dazed to answer. As in a dream—a hideous nightmare—he accompanied his latest caller. It had been an eventful evening. On the sofa Bill (Mr. Timothy Treadway) slumbered on. Poor Saki stood in the center of the room—a discouraged, disconsolate picture of woe.

What had happened and why had it happened? The faithful little professor felt that somehow he had been at fault; perhaps he had not spoken his lesson at sufficient length. For the moment, the unhappy Saki seriously contemplated hari-kari, but he was deterred from that desperate expedient at the sight of the still slumbering guest of the evening. Under the circumstances, it would not be good etiquette to “change his state”; rather was it his duty to remain, watch over his master’s guest, and, especially, guard his absent employer’s belongings from the too ready fingers of vandal hands. Saki went to bed.

## CHAPTER XX

“**T**HERE they go.” Mrs. Slipaway dodged around a corner of the apartment building and watched the figures of the officer and the luckless Mr. Slipaway, as they came out of the main entrance and passed down the shadowy street. “The actor-gentleman must have played his part very well, to have deceived poor, dear Horatio!”

“Well, that was because we rehearsed it several times; I acted up to him as Horatio,” observed the minister. “Mr. Treadway said I was a natural actor and complimented me very highly.”

“Did he?” said Mrs. Slipaway absently. “Do you know, I feel almost now as if we had done wrong.”

“Don’t let that worry you,” observed her companion quickly. “Mr. Slipaway needed a lesson—and a good one. He will emerge from the experience a chastened and, I trust, a better man.”

“That’s just it,” said the lady. “Will it take the spirit out of him? And how ‘chastened’ will it make him?” As she spoke she sighed. Was that sigh a

confession of weakness for the erstwhile dashing and bold—if reprehensible—reincarnation of Bill? “A woman doesn’t like a man too ‘chastened,’ does she now?”

“I should not call a proper admixture of spiritual exaltation, in the nature of man, as calculated to make him ‘too chastened’ to appeal to your sex,” responded the good man rather stiffly.

“I don’t know,” said Mrs. Slipaway, still gazing in the direction Horatio, under official guidance, had taken. “I was reading the other night about one of those terrible buccaneers of the Spanish Main, and how attractive he was to so many lovely ladies! A beautiful duchess was among them. The story said she left her husband, six lovely children and her ancestral halls just to roam and roam with him.”

“And can *you* understand that?” said the Reverend Mr. Bodkins in a still small voice.

“Maybe she just got tired of being hum-drum,” said Mrs. Slipaway, still regarding the void that had swallowed up Horatio. “We had a dog once, and every so often he ran away from home. We had a cat, too, and it did the same thing. Wanted to get out of a rut, I guess!”

“And do you venture to compare your sex—your gentle sex—with domestic *animals*?”

"Didn't *you* ever feel that desire to roam?" continued Mrs. Slipaway in that same far-away tone.

"Me?" said the startled minister.

"Just to jump out of your pulpit into the—the—well, the Somewhere Else?"

"I trust such a thought has never entered"—began the minister indignantly. Then he stopped. "Hum?" he said. "I should say if such a thought had ever entered my brain, I trust I—I—well, would never mention it to any one."

"Of course not," absently. "You know I feel a mite uneasy about Johnnie."

"Why?"

"When I asked him wouldn't he make up as an officer of the law, and pretend to arrest dear Horatio, he acted willing to be of help. Indeed, he almost 'fell over himself' telling me how he'd just love to arrest Horatio. And what he'd do if Horatio resisted an officer of the law. Somehow, his tone made me think he wouldn't be sorry if poor Horatio did resist, so he could use that club he carries. You see, Johnnie likes Horatio so much he mightn't resist the temptation to find a pretext for using that club. I told Johnnie I didn't exactly see any need of his carrying a club, but he only said: 'You've got to carry a club to be an officer of the

law. If I'm going to act this part I'll have to be consistent. I stand for being the real thing.' And he wouldn't give way. So I had to, knowing that I couldn't find anybody better for that particular rôle than Mr. Briggs."

"Yes; he has a natural talent for the part, I should say," observed the minister. "Did you notice how he gave Horatio an unnecessary jerk, as they came out? And how rough he spoke, telling him what he'd do, if he didn't go along quietly."

"Did I notice?" said Mrs. Slipaway. "I should say I did. And when I see Mr. Briggs I'll just tell him what I think. He said something about being an artist, and how he'd merge into the rôle like a regular genius. I suppose he thought those jerks he gave poor Horatio signs of genius, but I thought he over-acted."

"Too brutally realistic to be really fine acting," commented the minister.

"Well, I'll have the satisfaction of telling Johnnie so, at any rate," observed Mrs. Slipaway with a certain satisfaction. "He'll come to me, expecting to be slathered all over with compliments, and won't it cut his pride to be criticized? He was so conceited when he talked about how he could act the part. Talked about the 'third degree' and how he'd

love to administer it to dear Horatio. In fact, I don't like Mr. Briggs' manner at all in the matter!"

"Possibly, Mr. Briggs is not altogether disinterested," suggested the minister slyly.

Mrs. Slipaway professed not to understand. "I wonder where they are now? And has Mr. Briggs let Horatio escape yet as planned?"

"That was the program," observed the minister. "I wish we could have rented a police-station to have taken him too, but that was out of the question. I should have liked to see his face when Mr. Treadway pretended to be the real Bill."

"I don't know," said Mrs. Slipaway. "Seems almost like taking a mean advantage, doesn't it? And think of the poor dear when Mr. Briggs lets him escape. A fugitive from justice—that's what he'll think he is."

"Give him time to meditate, reflect and repent!"

"Yes; he'll be like those bold buccaneers of the Spanish Main," said Mrs. Slipaway. "But isn't this Johnnie?" As a figure uncertainly approached them.

"It is. What can have happened to him?"

"What have you done with your club, Mr. Briggs?" said Mrs. Slipaway sternly.

The remnants of Mr. Briggs leaned against the wall. His hat was dented and he groaned. "This

for you!" he said, addressing Mrs. Slipaway reproachfully.

"Did you frame it up so he could escape, Johnnie?" said the minister.

"I didn't need to frame it up," groaned Johnnie, removing his now superfluous whiskers. "I was just telling him my opinion of him—and all those different crimes he had committed—when suddenly he grabbed my club—biff! Never have I seen so many stars before! Whole constellations of them! Biff! When I recovered he was gone."

"That was smart of him, anyhow, wasn't it?" said Mrs. Slipaway, a faint accent of admiration in her tones.

"At any rate, it made his escape seem more natural," said the minister.

"Much better than Mr. Briggs just *letting* him go," said Mrs. Slipaway. "He might have seen through that."

"Well, everything has turned out very well," observed the Reverend Mr. Bodkins.

"Has it?" said Mr. Briggs in an ugly tone.

"Of course," said Mrs. Slipaway smoothly. "I was afraid Mr. Briggs might not act natural enough in permitting him to get away—that he might be too open about it. But Mr. Slipaway's taking the sit-

uation into his own hands, was quite a happy coincidence."

"Was it?" said Johnnie Briggs in that same tone.

"It was," said the lady. "I didn't altogether like the way you played that part, Johnnie." Severely.

"No?" said Mr. Briggs with a baleful glare.

"No," repeated Mrs. Slipaway severely.

"What was the matter with my acting?" snapped Mr. Briggs, holding his head.

"It was quite too unnecessarily—rough!" said the lady.

What Johnnie said matters not.

## CHAPTER XXI

FOR several days they saw nothing of the fugitive, and during these days a patched-up Mr. Briggs called frequently upon Mrs. Slipaway. Ostensibly, he called first after the escape of Horatio to apologize for a certain remark he had made on that memorable evening, after the good lady had accused him (Johnnie) of having been "unnecessarily rough." Mrs. Slipaway had parted very coldly with Mr. Briggs on that occasion—indeed, so coldly as to give the impression that henceforth Johnnie might consider himself a total stranger to her. This did not suit Mr. Briggs at all. Never had the image of Mrs. Slipaway appealed to him so strongly as now.

Newly gowned, hatted and shod, it was as if a new and more engaging vision of her had arisen to dazzle his attention. Mrs. Slipaway dug into the nest-egg with reckless abandon; clothes had a sudden charm for her; the heels of her shoes kept getting higher and her hats bigger. She made the

discovery she wore her clothes well; that her naturally good figure was well-adapted to exhibit the wares of the up-to-date modistes. Also, she made the discovery that men looked at her on the street, but this did not displease her. With the new clothes came sundry changes in the house; a bright rug animated the floor; sundry etchings replaced the mottoes. Other innovations followed.

"You see, when Horatio comes back he may like it better," said Mrs. Slipaway quite frankly to the minister.

"Puts an idea in my head," said the latter thoughtfully. "Maybe I ought to 'spruce up' a bit, too."

"You?" said Mrs. Slipaway.

"At the church," he explained. "You see, the attendance is falling off."

"I read about a minister who gave moving-pictures in his church, and now he's turning them away," said Mrs. Slipaway absently.

The minister started slightly. Then he absently took his leave. It was after this visit that Johnnie Briggs dropped in for the first time since his histrionic triumph. He wore a rather hang-dog expression; he just couldn't stay away, although he was certainly greatly put out, and felt himself ill-used. He had told himself he would set the image

of the lady and the accompanying nest-egg out of his mind and heart forever, only to discover that was easier said than done. As he added up columns of figures and performed other menial tasks appertaining to the routine of his daily duties, said image, with all its fresh and matronly charms, danced ever before his mental vision. Mr. Briggs had fully determined never—never—to call upon that lady again, under the pretext of being of service as a friend of Horatio; nevertheless, in due course of events, he found himself wending his way slavishly to her bower.

Mrs. Slipaway received him—coldly, albeit—but she received him. Possibly Johnnie might have some word of the fugitive. Mr. Briggs' face as he found himself in the lady's presence was that of the knight of the sad and mournful countenance. One eye was slightly discolored, which added to his funereal and lugubrious appearance. He was not the same gentleman who had used the naughty word so savagely and explosively when accused of having been "unnecessarily rough"; indeed, he looked as if the sky had fallen down and hit him, and wicked, peppery ejaculations had been banished from his vocabulary forever. Mrs. Slipaway did not ask him to sit down at first; and Mr. Briggs, standing awk-

wardly, conscious of the unprepossessing aspect of his right optic, murmured disconnected words of apology and regret, and then disjointed reiterations of said words, humbling himself to the dust, as it were, and then rolling over.

Mrs. Slipaway listened with perfunctory and lady-like dignity. "I know I shouldn't have said it," breathed the mournful knight of the disfigured visage, "and I'm sorry. Of course, no gentleman should say what he thinks before a lady."

"A gentleman shouldn't think what he ought not to say before a lady," responded Mrs. Slipaway with unbending coldness.

"Of course he oughtn't," assented Johnnie eagerly, "but man is gross. And—I guess I was a little upset—such a wallop! Whew!"

"What did you expect—after handling him so roughly?" observed Mrs. Slipaway sweetly.

Mr. Briggs swallowed. "Was—was I rough?" he said miserably.

"You were." Severely. "You showed very plainly you have an inherent cruel streak in your disposition."

"Me cruel?" said the miserable Mr. Briggs. "You—you don't know what a—a really tender nature I've got. Why, when I think of—some things—I

—I just seem to melt all over. Besides, there was the provocation—”

“I am sure he was going with you as meek as a lamb,” said the lady.

“A lamb! Him, a lamb! Why, when I think how he’s treated you—it was the thought of that made me speak a little sharp to him—it was the thought of his misconduct to you—his cruelty—the deception—”

“And it was that made you forget how fond you always were of him?” said Mrs. Slipaway with slight irony.

“It did!” cried Johnnie. “Much as I like Horatio, your—your image must come first. Woman—gentle woman—isn’t it a man’s part always to protect her? Why, when I looked in the mirror this morning, you know what I felt? Exultation!” proclaimed Johnnie. “That I got *it*”—touching his eye—“in your service. Yes, sir; when I see the finest woman in the world ground down—trod beneath foot—humiliated—scorned—when I behold all that, I say any scars received by my poor humble person in the upholding of—of—”

“Won’t you sit down, Mr. Briggs?” Johnnie did—gladly. Had his eloquence secured for him this slight concession?

"I'm proud of that eye," he repeated.

"Are you?" said the lady. "It isn't much to be—" and smiling slightly she left the sentence unfinished. Mr. Briggs lolled back, more at his ease; the ice was broken—the Goddess of Love be praised! He eyed Mrs. Slipaway's extra-high-heeled little shoe with tender emotions. How well that daintily-shod foot would look on the fender of his (Johnnie's) domestic fireplace. Of course, Horatio wouldn't come back now, with all those crimes hanging over him, thought Mr. Briggs, and the charming lady could find many and ample reasons for untying the holy knot that doesn't bind, or shouldn't. Then Johnnie noticed the bright rug.

"You've been making some changes," he observed.

"Yes," said Mrs. Slipaway. "What's the use of having money if you don't spend it?"

This gave Johnnie a slight shock. "Referring to that—ah!—sacred legacy?" he observed in a tone he endeavored to make playful, but which nevertheless conveyed a slight note of anxiety.

"I am," said the lady brightly. "Only it isn't sacred any more."

"No?" said Johnnie, still striving to mask his deep disappointment. The sacred nest-egg dwind-

ling away?—Intolerable thought! Mr. Briggs twisted uneasily. “Is it wise?—Is it prudent?—We have to think of the future,” he observed. “That rainy-day, you know!” he added, heroically struggling to speak in his most disinterested tone.

“I’ve been thinking,” said Mrs. Slipaway.

“No?” said Johnnie once more, with a deeper sinking of spirits. Whenever Mrs. Slipaway slipped into that “thinking” silence Johnnie had noticed something usually happened afterward.

“Yes,” said Mrs. Slipaway. “Maybe nest-eggs are like other eggs. Don’t do to keep them too long.”

“The Chinese keep eggs for ever and ever so long,” remarked Johnnie, thinking of no better argument on the spur of the moment.

“True; but who would be a Chinese?” murmured Mrs. Slipaway. “I’ve heard they treat their women something shameful. I’m sure I wouldn’t want to belong to a country that treats its women shamefully.”

“You—you wouldn’t have to,” murmured Johnnie weakly. “I—I was just referring to their—their custom of keeping eggs.”

“Eggs should be used when they’re fresh,” remarked Mrs. Slipaway.

"Ordinary eggs," said Johnnie. "But nest-eggs—the Chinese custom might apply to nest-eggs!" He thought that rather clever. "Not hens'!"

"I wouldn't like to do anything the way the Chinese do," remarked the lady.

"Of course not," said Johnnie subtly. "But nest-eggs can't spoil, like hens'," he laughed, endeavoring to appear as if the subject was of no moment whatever to him. "Quite to the contrary! Left alone, they get bigger and better. And when the rainy-day"—jocularly—"does come—"

"There isn't going to be any rainy-day," said Mrs. Slipaway. "I made up my mind to enjoy myself a little."

"Of course," said Johnnie, visions of a vanishing nest-egg floating darkly before his brain.

"I've been frugal. Now I'm going to be a spender," said Mrs. Slipaway. "Why should some people be the spenders and others not?"

"Why, indeed?" murmured Johnnie mournfully.

"I've been thinking of that motto I gave away. 'The Lord Will Provide.' What's it mean? Is it an invitation to be frugal? It is not. It just tells you to go right ahead—to have faith. Seems to me I've been misinterpreting that motto all these years. I've been sinfully lacking in faith."

"Say not so!" mumbled Mr. Briggs.

"Now I got it—and I'm not afraid."

"No?"

"I'm beginning to learn that fear's what makes most people too frugal and skimpy. It keeps them back; it's bad for them. Seems like I'd just begun to wake up and have faith."

At this distorted and perfectly irrational philosophical conclusion, or sophistry, Mr. Briggs could but preserve a painful and distressed silence. He went home—to his lonely room—to meditate darkly upon the perversion of fortune, in general, and woman, in particular. The worst was, he couldn't get the image of Mrs. Slipaway out of his mind, with or without the nest-egg. And then Johnnie came to a very reckless and generous determination. He would marry her anyhow—without the nest-egg. Although he had hardly enough to support one, still would he court the expenses of two. He, also, would have "faith," and thus thinking he felt quite heroic; indeed, as he looked at himself in the mirror he thought his figure had expanded into new and more noble proportions. He was no longer the knight of the sad and doleful countenance. The discoloration of his optic was like a gorgeous badge of merit.

"I've been thinking," he told the good lady, one day not long thereafter.

"You?" said Mrs. Slipaway rather incredulously.

"Me," said Johnnie. "It's that faith-stuff. Go ahead and spend it. What's the difference?"

The lady looked at him sharply. Johnnie, at the moment, appeared in a mood of undue exhilaration.

"Only I'd—I'd just like to have a little talk."

"Yes?" said the lady.

"About—" Johnnie flushed deeply. "Well, after—"

"After?" she said.

"After you get it from him—"

"It? Oh, you mean a d—"

"Of course," said Johnnie. "I—I'd just like to say, I—I—wouldn't be afraid to—you know—?"

"Marry me?" said the lady quietly.

"That's it," exclaimed Johnnie.

"Without the nest-egg?" said she.

"D—— the nest-egg!" cried Johnnie.

She gave him rather a queer look.

"There! I've gone and used one of those words again!" said Johnnie.

"Never mind!" said she.

"I know it isn't strictly proper to—well—"

"It is rather premature," she observed.

"I don't want you to give me your answer now, of course, based on that—contingency—your—"

"Oh, I'm not afraid," said the lady unexpectedly. "Why shouldn't we have a perfect understanding? Especially after the noble—shall we say disinterested—character of your—proposal?" Johnnie began to swell. "Of course, I realize it is a proposal, based on a certain contingency. A little irregular, or premature, still—its very disinterestedness—its flattering and somewhat surprising assurance that it is I, and not the nest-egg—" Her voice trailed away. "Here is your answer, Mr. Briggs."

"Oh!" said Johnnie, as if almost overcome with too much joyful anticipation.

"In the event of my divorce from Mr. Slipaway—"

"Which you will procure, of course." Sotto voce from Mr. Briggs.

"—I promise to be yours!"

"Oh!" said Johnnie again.

The lady smiled.

"This is too—too great joy!" breathed Johnnie.

"Try to bear up under it," murmured the lady.

"I will," said Mr. Briggs.

"Now go," said the lady, and Mr. Briggs staggered blissfully from the house.

True, a few doubts and misgivings did crop up later to assail him, but it was too late to draw back now; he had committed himself inexorably to the future financial upkeep of a lovely lady, quite a responsibility! But then—a comforting thought did insinuate itself in Johnnie's brain—perhaps Mrs. Slipaway could force a comfortable sum from Horatio, as a little consolation for all she had suffered in his hands. Perhaps said sum would be as large as the dissipated nest-egg, and, once married, Johnnie could look after this little titbit from his dear friend Horatio's pocket-book. Johnnie even began to plan how he would invest that titbit. As Bill Carter, Horatio had made money. While figuring in a noble disinterested rôle, Johnnie began mentally calculating how much Horatio could be made to disgorge. From this premise Mr. Briggs soon began to estimate the fortune he would build up, with the little titbit from Mr. Slipaway's pocketbook as an inspiring "starter," and it wasn't long before the now elated Johnnie saw himself possessed of vast means, with the charming Mrs. Slipaway—that was—by his side to assist him

in maintaining his various establishments in the country and in town. This picture suggested to Johnnie a species of poetic justice for the indignity—damaged optic—he (Johnnie) had suffered from his dear friend Horatio. Love *and* revenge!—the consummation of both! Mr. Briggs hugged the thought to his heart. Mrs. Slipaway had promised to be his after she had divorced dear, dear Horatio—and Mrs. Slipaway was a lady of her word.

## CHAPTER XXII

A SHADOW that had been Horatio Slipaway approached warily the Slipaway home several nights later, hesitated, walked by without entering, then, stealing in the darkness to the side of the house, gazed furtively within. What he saw surprised him greatly; a renovated interior—dainty pictures, in the place of mottoes; a bright rug where the old rag carpet had been; new wall-paper—cheerful wall-paper—think of it! And Mrs. Slipaway herself!—bright and cheery-looking!—her neat foot encased in a coquettish slipper—her trim ankle set off with gay hosiery—yes, gay! Where the house-organ, with its doleful memories of *Pull for the Shore, In the Sweet By-and-By*, and kindred depressing ditties, had stood, there was now a victrola grinding out a fox-trot. The mournful likeness, or libel, in funereal crayon of that erstwhile saintly man, Horatio's predecessor, had disappeared—and the whole place seemed cheered and illumined by his absence. A lamp with a pink shade threw a rosy light upon the happy scene. The outcast

breathed deeply. What an attractive little home! Oh, if he only could—dared—enter it! Mrs. Slipaway was speaking; the minister was listening. He looked changed, too; his face was more cheerful; he acted as if he no longer cherished a pessimistic attitude toward original sin, and human perversities in general.

“Yes,” Mrs. Slipaway was saying, “I put his picture in the attic. It didn’t seem to fit in with the general harmony of the other effects. Black doesn’t go very well with pink; do you think so? Also, it and that light kind of music didn’t seem to get on very well in the same room. So I put it safely away in the attic. It’s nice and quiet and a kind of religious atmosphere up there. I do hope Horatio won’t mind—when he comes back, not finding it here. He used to tell me how he used to look up to that picture. Ah, me!” Mrs. Slipaway sighed; outside, Mr. Slipaway had a funny feeling somewhere in the neighborhood of his heart.

“Besides,” went on Mrs. Slipaway, “when I got that new kind of faith about not worrying over the future, and seeing how nest-eggs were made to spend, the sight of IT on the wall began to be somewhat disconcerting. You can’t convert some one who has passed on, to the new faith, can you?”

"Not very easily," said the caller.

"Knowing which," resumed Mrs. Slipaway, "it seemed we would agree better with him in another place, where he wouldn't ruffle the atmosphere. Of course, when Mr. Slipaway returns, if he wants him back, I suppose I couldn't refuse, but I hope he won't insist."

"Let us hope not," observed the minister. "Odd, how one's opinions undergo a transformation!"

"You're thinking of your church?"

"Yes; after the congregation fell off, so there weren't any people to speak of left, the trustees intimated I had to fill the church or pass on to other pastures. So I introduced moving pictures of sacred subjects, with incidental religious remarks. Now there aren't enough seats; my salary has been raised twice—and all from a chance remark of yours!"

"Well, there isn't any use of being a back number," said Mrs. Slipaway decisively. "Dear Horatio got tired of being a back number; I guess that's all was the matter with him." Mr. Slipaway listened more attentively. Mrs. Slipaway's tones were almost too soft and caressing.

"Poor fellow!" The minister laughed. "I suppose he's lurking in allies and sleeping in dry-goods boxes and begging hand-me-outs to eat and shiver-

ing at the sight of his own shadow!" At this touching picture of his presumably miserable situation, Horatio shook his fist in the darkness. And they could discuss him thus, and laugh!

"I suppose it's good for him," said Mrs. Slipaway with a sigh. "Probably his poor feet are out at the toes, from running away, by this time."

"Most unfortunate the real Bill Carter should have come back, wasn't it?" chuckled the minister.

"Wasn't it?" said Mrs. Slipaway, laughing too. "Poor dear Horatio should have thought he might come back."

Poor dear Horatio began to quiver with rage. So they were laughing at him, and his misery?

"Yes; he left the real Bill out of his calculations altogether."

"A criminal!"

"A fugitive from justice!"

"A murderer!"

Horatio began to feel like a murderer. Why, they were actually enjoying his sad plight. "Hand-me-outs"—"shivering at his own shadow"—"sleeping in dry-goods boxes"—was there anything funny in that? How true, the world likes to laugh at one's miseries! Make a man unhappy enough, and you have a farce! Make him more and more miserable

every minute, and you have a whooping success of a farce! Horatio's chest arose and fell with vehement protest. And this laughing, rejuvenated woman had once been his wife—indeed, was his wife now. Ah, the pity of it; the tragedy of it! Clad in her new finery, she scoffed at his woe. Why, she was a regular Delilah! Should he spring forth and confront them? Of what avail?

"How do you explain Mr. Slipaway's absence to the neighbors?" asked the minister after a few more perfectly intolerable chuckles.

"Why, I gave out Horatio had gone to Florida, and was basking with the millionairesses on the beach. Then sometimes I tell them about the fish he is catching."

"Oh, he's catching fish." And once more they enjoyed themselves. "But do you—is it quite right—prevarication can never be excused, you know."

"Well, this was sort of true," said Mrs. Slipaway. "After Horatio used his own better judgment and did just the opposite to what Mr. Vancourtland wanted him to, and made, instead of lost, thousands for that gentleman—" Mr. Slipaway, at the listening-post, started violently.

"Mr. Vancourtland can't do too much for Horatio. He phoned me saying what a financial genius

he'd showed himself to be. And he wanted Horatio and me to take a trip on his yacht."

"Yes; Mr. Slipaway showed what he could do, as Bill Carter. Why, if the real Bill hadn't come back, he'd have been a millionaire by this time."

"Poor fellow! It was a shame to nip him in the bud," said Mrs. Slipaway. "But it had to be."

Their commiseration was worse than their laughter to the lonely outcast without. With what a shock had he heard of Mr. Vancourtland's good fortune; why, that gentleman, instead of wanting to have Horatio arrested, had only been desirous of tying bouquets to him. And he (Horatio) had been running away from bouquets instead of constables. He hadn't had nearly as much reason for his psychic disappearance as he had supposed. He might even have stayed and defied the breach-of-promise woman and sundry annoying creditors. Too late Mr. Slipaway realized he had been running around in a circle. If he wasn't Bill Carter, and he wasn't Horatio Slipaway, who was he? He felt more like a squirrel in a cage.

"I hope they won't find him and electrocute him," breathed Mrs. Slipaway.

"If they did, you would have to—" The minister shook a playful finger at her.

"You mean Mr. Briggs?" Mrs. Slipaway spoke the words with a positive giggle. Horatio ground his teeth. Such outrageous levity!

"Then you wouldn't have to divorce Mr. Slipaway—"

"To marry Mr. Briggs?" Yes; she spoke the words. Mr. Slipaway could hardly believe his ears. Divorce him, to marry Johnnie Briggs—that miserable, crawling Uriah Heep—oh, Horatio saw through him now. Pretended to be his friend—so as to get rid of him—then—

"Yes," said Mrs. Slipaway, with another shameless giggle, "I had to promise I'd marry Mr. Briggs after I had divorced Horatio!"

And the minister, too, seemed to see nothing in this fearfully depraved statement of a reprehensible character. Why, they were like two conspirators sitting there!

"After you divorced Mr. Slipaway!" laughed the caller. "Weren't you afraid to make that promise?"

"Me?" said Mrs. Slipaway. "Not a bit."

"Hussy!" muttered the man at the window.

"You see, Mr. Briggs is so noble—generous—disinterested. A woman couldn't make a mistake with him, could she?"

"I don't think you would make a mistake, as far

as Mr. Briggs is concerned," said the caller gallantly.

Horatio almost groaned. Why, it was hardly proper — and he a minister — talking like that — marry some one else, before she was divorced — Never before had Mrs. Slipaway looked so gay and frivolous; also, so — yes, attractive! These light and wayward fancies seemed to have given her a new youthfulness; her cheek had a bloom like unto a peach.

"Of course, if he were electrocuted it would make it very simple," guffawed the caller.

"Much simpler," assented Mrs. Slipaway.

From heights of baffled rage Horatio descended to depths of sorrow and reproach. They could talk of his demise thus — lightly — casually — Not that Horatio had the slightest fear of being electrocuted; the real Bill would probably be found some day and the shadow lifted from him (Horatio), only meanwhile, it was deucedly inconvenient dodging around with those things fastened on to you. Why, he couldn't even draw from the very considerable bank-account he had in one of the city institutions in William Carter's name; nor dared he return to his comfortable apartments where the faithful Saki still kept mournful vigil. That was the worst of

it; he, the erstwhile energetic "live wire," now consigned to a spineless and inert existence. He, Horatio Slipaway, in whom had been discovered new forces, a roaming, idle fugitive, the while his dear friend Johnnie had been undermining the peace of his fireside. For the moment Mr. Slipaway was at a loss just what to do. Should he go away or stay? He heard the front door-bell ring. He determined to wait just a little longer; something interesting might happen; it did.

## CHAPTER XXIII

**A**REJUVENATED Bridget went to the front door. Formerly Bridget had been careless of her attire and her appearance; but Mrs. Slipaway had, apparently, not only done over her house (and in a measure) herself, she had likewise done over her maid-servant. A becorseted Bridget greeted the gaze of the watcher at the window; in fact, Bridget was so tightly becorseted that she stuck out in places in great bulges, reminding the rather startled gazer of an overgrown Venus. Bridget returned with the caller—or rather the callers—and Mr. Slipaway had the surprise of his life.

Real Bill Carter entered the room, and by his side was the breach-of-promise woman! Horatio felt impelled to run away, to lose himself in the abysms of night, but he seemed frozen to the spot. Mrs. Slipaway greeted the visitors cordially; Horatio gasped. The real Bill held himself debonairly.

"This is her," he said. "We did the trick all right."

"I'm sure I congratulate you and wish you every happiness," said Mrs. Slipaway sweetly.

The impressionistic lady curved her body into a new angle.

"I'm sure you're very kind," she said. "I just fell in love with Mr. Treadway the first thing, and I couldn't help it." She spoke in jerks—emotion, no doubt. Bill (Mr. Treadway) gazed at her proudly. "It was all so romantic! Don't you love romance, Mrs. Slipaway?" That lady told her she did. Horatio listened with commingling emotions—amazement—wonder—awe—struggling in his breast.

"Well, you not only got an engagement—you got a wife, didn't you?" said the minister to Mr. Treadway.

"Some little girl," said the proud Bill.

"I don't yet know quite how it happened," said the minister.

"Looks as if I'd done the proposing," said the "passion-pale" lady with another twist of her lithe form. "Seems kind of forward, on my part!"

"Don't let that worry you," said the happy "Bill."

"How'd you say it was?" said the minister.

"Well, you see," said the groom, "the last I remember up in your husband's room, ma'am"—to Mrs. Slipaway—"was taking a strangle-hold on a

Grand-pop, and wrestling with the contents. It was a villainous plot against my fair fame. I can see it all now. They deliberately conspired to put me 'to sleep.' The Jap boy was ever at my elbow—ever there, with his insidious smile, and another pop-pop. How many Grand-pops popped I do not know. 'Nice tickle-drops!' urged the little fiend. 'Drink,' said his master, with a slimy, treacherous smile.

"When I awoke, I was alone, but on my breast was a paper—a summons in a breach-of-promise case! The process-server, it seems, had entered, and finding me there, concluded I was this villain, Horatio Slipaway. So he served me. When I read that paper, I felt moved. 'Poor little girl, how have you been treated?' says I to myself." The lady in the case shifted her body into a new posture—symbolic, no doubt, of Desolation, or Desertion.

"I made up my mind to call upon her," said Mr. Treadway. "That paper seemed like a sort of summons to do so."

"Seemed kind of forward on my part!" repeated the impressionistic lady.

"I found her in. We just looked at each other, and knew it was to be. It certainly was a sizzling love-affair. She forgot about the other chap right off; never had cared for him. Just a bit of innocent

flirtation on her part; that was all. Besides, she was gifted with imagination; seemed it would be rather exciting to get into court; maybe it would attract attention to her and she could get into the movies."

"Of course, I can quite understand," said Mrs. Slipaway.

"It really was a very innocent affair," observed the impressionistic lady.

"Don't bother to explain," said Mrs. Slipaway. "I absolved dear Horatio of all blame when I first saw you."

The impressionistic lady looked at her; honey-sweet was Mrs. Slipaway's smile. You wouldn't have thought there was a double twist to her words.

"A very happy culmination," observed the minister. "I am sure Mr. Treadway has well-earned his salary for impersonating one very wicked jail-bird."

"Impersonating?" Outside, Mr. Slipaway held his head. He began to understand—a frame-up?—ah!—what a hideous conspiracy.

"Yes; we had to create a real Bill to rout poor dear Horatio," put in Mrs. Slipaway.

"And wasn't he easy?" remarked Mr. Treadway.

"Or your acting was unusually good, dear," complimented the breach-of-promise lady.

"Anyhow, he just ate up my story," laughed Mr. Treadway. "How I'd escaped from jail; how I'd 'beaned' some one in the house where I was born, and burned down the little old schoolhouse!—swallowed it all!"

"It was your convincing ways," said the bride.

"Maybe! And then he sat planning how he could get even; feed me tickle-drops, and then hand me over to the police! Ha! ha!"

"Yes; he certainly treated William very well," said the bride. "But you won't drink like that again, will you?"

"Never," said Mr. Treadway promptly. "I don't expect ever to be tempted like that a second time. Such things don't happen to a man more than once in a lifetime."

"I like to hear you say that," said she.

"Did you marry him to reform him, dear?" said Mrs. Slipaway in a funny tone.

"Why, perhaps that was it," she returned with a jerk.

"Well, here I stand waiting to be moulded," said the happy Mr. Treadway. And his expression, at

the moment, was as inanely blissful as a happy piece of dough, eagerly awaiting the fair hand.

Mrs. Slipaway passed Mr. Treadway a check. Mr. Treadway accepted it with satisfaction. "It will help for the honeymoon," he said. "I suppose he made his escape as per schedule?"

"Hardly," said Mrs. Slipaway. "You see, Johnnie Briggs, dressed up as an officer—"

"Johnnie Briggs!" muttered Mr. Slipaway, without.

"And Horatio, I suppose, got rather impatient, and as you, Mr. Treadway, would say, 'beaned' him."

"Ha, ha!" laughed Mr. Treadway, "I told you he would mess it up somehow. These amateurs always do. But good night, madam, and thank you for the job."

"Seems as if we ought to throw a few old shoes after them," exclaimed Mrs. Slipaway.

"Aw!" said the bride bashfully.

"I think I could find a few old pairs of Horatio's," said Mrs. Slipaway. "And wouldn't that be romantic?"

"What?" said the minister.

"To throw a pair of old shoes of Horatio's after her!"

"I did step in his shoes, in a way," said Mr. Treadway.

"In a way," said Mrs. Slipaway.

"Good day," said the bride.

"Good-by," said the others.

"God bless you," added the minister.

Only Horatio said nothing. He was stricken dumb as well as frozen to the spot.

## CHAPTER XXIV

AS Mr. Slipaway groped his way uncertainly from the spot he tried to think, but his brain seemed befogged. A "frame-up!" There wasn't any real Bill. What a master-stroke on the part of Mrs. Slipaway! He recalled the shivers of apprehension with which he had gazed upon that colossal humbug, real Bill, who was none other than an impersonator from stageland. And to think Mrs. Slipaway—the seemingly guileless one—had "put this over" on him—the resourceful, bold and original reincarnation of William Carter! Amid his resentment lurked a feeling of vague admiration for that good lady. Why, his wife was clever—positively clever—devilishly so! And he had never known it before. He had learned a great deal since his little adventure in another man's skin.

What an unsophisticated ass he had been. Especially to have trusted Johnnie Briggs! As he thought of that false friend—that wolf in sheep's clothing—a queer feeling ran down Mr. Slipaway's

spine. Mrs. Slipaway had promised to marry Johnnie, when she had divorced him (Slipaway). Not the Mrs. Slipaway that had been, either, but a rejuvenated, most attractive-looking Mrs. Slipaway—a charming matron who, since she had shed trouble and worry, seemed to have been drinking of the fountain of youth! As Horatio now mentally reviewed her attractions, he told himself with a feeling of satisfaction how glad he was that he had clubbed Johnnie good and hard that ill-omened night of the arrest. His only regret was that he had not struck harder; if he could only have repeated that blow now there would be left no Johnnie, he told himself. He should have struck that gentleman hard enough so that he would have lost all sense of his identity forever.

The problem of the future was now with Mr. Slipaway; there no longer existed any reason why he should continue that ridiculous fugitive-from-justice performance. The breach-of-promise lady was happily disposed of; his financial misadventure with Mr. Vancourtland's money had made a hero instead of a felon of him. He could remain Bill Carter, or he could once more resume the even tenor of his way as Horatio Slipaway, thereby thwarting that treacherous Johnnie's double-faced plotting. Should

he tamely resign the rejuvenated Mrs. Slipaway to that paltry little worm, Mr. Briggs? To remain as Bill Carter might lead to this unthinkable catastrophe. On the other hand, to return to his old self involved fearful humiliation and a gruesome confession of his own duplicity, which was also unthinkable to his proud and sensitive soul—and Mr. Slipaway, after all he had endured, as a hunted and tortured fugitive from justice, was not in a mood, either humble or repentant. How they had laughed at him; that old blackbird of a minister had positively chuckled!

No man likes to be made a fool of; nor does he desire to bend before those who have stricken his sensibilities to the core. Mr. Slipaway was deeply hurt; that felicitous description of him skulking like a hobo; sleeping amid ash-barrels and tomato-cans; devouring odd scraps handed out from back-doors—that gibing picture of his supposed misfortunes, into which he had been thrust by the machinations of the vivacious Mrs. Slipaway and her conspirator of the cloth, was profoundly mortifying to one who had so recently been a haughty conqueror of finance and bold trimmer of llamas. Animated by these emotions of indignant resentment, Mr. Slipaway suddenly turned and walked to his own front door. He rang

the bell boldly; Mrs. Slipaway answered it herself, Bridget having just gone out—to the movies.

"Oh," said Mrs. Slipaway, with no signs of surprise, "so you've come back. I was expecting you. Walk in. The Reverend Mr. Bodkins is there. He, too, will enjoy meeting you."

"Madam," said Mr. Slipaway impressively, "I have called as the friend of your husband, Mr. Slipaway. I used to know Horatio well."

"Oh!" said Mrs. Slipaway. "Well, sit down anyway. So you've only just come for a little social call?"

"Quite so," said Mr. Slipaway easily. He felt that now his turn had come.

"Well," said Mrs. Slipaway, exchanging a look with the minister, "I am sorry he is not here to receive you."

"Yes; that would be a joy," said Horatio coolly. Nothing like rubbing it in! (They would humiliate him, would they?)

"I've been expecting him along almost any time now," observed Mrs. Slipaway.

"He's been away and you're expecting him to return?" observed Horatio languidly.

"Almost any time," repeated Mrs. Slipaway lightly.

"Maybe, if I wait a little while, I might meet him?"

"You might," she said with a sweet smile.

For a time he talked about commonplace topics, just as if he were real Bill Carter, and the lady responded in kind. But Horatio could see she was puzzled; a fugitive from justice should act nervous, and Bill Carter, with all those crimes she had planted on his shoulders, should seem worried to death. This Bill Carter just crossed his legs easily and descanted eloquently and annoyingly about that exasperating subject—Patagonia. He plied them with Patagonia until the minister's head was whirling and the good lady had gradually lost most of her vivacity. Then he started in and repeated himself. He told them of adventures—fictitious—he had had.

"And speaking about adventures," he observed, "I had rather an odd experience the other night. Chap dropped in, pretending he was me."

"Did he?" said the lady, studying the visitor.

"What could have been his object?" said the minister slowly.

"At first I thought he was—" Horatio tapped his head.

"Then, when a fake officer arrested me, I saw it was just a little practical joke."

"Joke?" said the lady.

"On the part of some of my broker-friends. They're awful jokers, those brokers! We're always playing tricks on one another."

"Are you?" said Mrs. Slipaway faintly.

"Yes, indeed. But they didn't fool me, in the least. Because, you see, I recognized the fake-officer. Met him once in the broker's office. Homely little fish called Boggs or Briggs or something."

The expressions on their faces rewarded the narrator. "I'm afraid I treated poor little Boggs rough," he said softly. "I really must write him a letter of apology." It was Horatio who now chuckled. Humble him to the dust, would they?—make him eat crow?—he laughed long and loud. "Joke's certainly on them!"

"Is it?" said Mrs. Slipaway in a very strange tone.

Horatio leaned back, delighted. Once more he felt like a conqueror—a llama-king. "They have to get up pretty early to put one over on old Bill Carter," he bragged. "But I am sorry for that insignificant little Boggs."

"Are you?" said Mrs. Slipaway.

"Poor chap! I fear I gave him a headache. But you wouldn't know him, of course."

"No," said Mrs. Slipaway. "I don't know any one by the name of Boggs."

"Well, you don't miss much," said the condescending Horatio. Then he glanced at a watch. "Bless me, how time flies in pleasant company. I really must be going."

"You won't wait on a chance of Horatio's returning?" she asked slowly.

"No," said Mr. Slipaway. "I have several other very important engagements. I trust I have not bored you with my meanderings about the country of my early choosing?"

"No; you haven't bored me," she answered mechanically. "I shouldn't call it that."

"So pleased!" said the visitor, and with extreme grace and courtesy eliminated himself.

*"What do you think of that?"*

Mrs. Slipaway and the minister regarded each other.

"Of course, there is only one explanation," said the lady. "He has learned all about it and has turned the tables rather neatly."

"Too bad, after all the pains we took!" murmured the minister. "The pains and the expense!"

"Yes; it is too bad, and I am dreadfully disap-

pointed," she confessed, "but at the same time, wasn't it clever of him? You know I'm beginning to think he has a master-mind." The minister did not look enthusiastic. "And how I once thought I understood him! Him, with all that deep perception!"

"The question is," said the minister dryly, "how did he find out?"

"How?" said the lady absently. "Intuition! He doesn't have to find out things in ordinary ways. He just knows them." As she spoke she sighed. "And isn't he a wonderful talker!"

"Liar, you mean," the minister nearly said, but managed to check the words. There was no use of disturbing Mrs. Slipaway's exalted mood.

"I certainly never appreciated Horatio," she now ruminated, almost sadly. "I suppose there are a lot of us like that—don't appreciate our blessings until they take wings and fly away."

"Hum?" said the minister. "Now I wonder?"—He was looking toward that side window. "Slightly open—ah!—and one standing outside might look in. May I?—a candle?"

The lady procured one for him, and going to the side of the house, the minister investigated.

"Foot-prints—in the soft earth!" he announced, returning to the sitting-room a few moments later.

"He stood there and heard every word we have been saying. That explains all."

Mrs. Slipaway still maintained that pensive air.

"I've been thinking," she said. "There's something just come to me, but it's terrible."

"If it's efficacious, I don't think we need hesitate for any ethical reasons."

"We've just *got* to save him now, haven't we?" said Mrs. Slipaway.

"How?" Curiously.

She explained.

"Masterly!" he exclaimed.

"Maybe," said Mrs. Slipaway, almost plaintively, "I'm not doing it for strictly moral reasons? Maybe, I don't want to force him to return to the fold because of conscientious motives? Maybe, I'm willing to go to terrible extremes for a very selfish reason?"

"A woman's reason?" he said softly.

Mrs. Slipaway blushed. Or was it just the reflection from the pink shade? The minister left her in a brown study. Then going down the front steps he chuckled. He was thinking of Mr. Briggs' (or Boggs') chances.

## CHAPTER XXV

**M**R. SLIPAWAY returned to his apartments. He wasn't altogether satisfied with himself; true, he had won a technical victory over those who had conspired against him, but he felt no great sense of elation as he meditated over his triumph. Somehow, the thought of that conspiring Johnnie Briggs annoyed him more than he confessed to himself. Then there were moments when a picture of the new cozy sitting-room arose before his mental vision. Had Mrs. Slipaway "cozied up" the place in anticipation of a future nuptial arrangement with the iniquitous Johnnie? Detestable thought! Horatio sighed. Would he have dropped back into his old self and environment, if he could have? Probably. But how to do so—gracefully—and without lack of dignity?—the problem was not easy.

Saki welcomed his master with exuberant gladness.

"Honorable Mr. William Carter not go, then, to dishonorable execution?" he said.

"Naw! Just a little pleasure-jaunt," said Ho-

ratio with a yawn. "You see, Saki, it was all only a little bit of fun. Whenever you want to have a little fun with a friend you just frame up something like that."

"Japanese fun no like that," said the puzzled Saki.

"That's just it. Every nation has its own kind of fun. And American humor is in a field all of its own."

Saki took out a note-book. "American fun: When you arrest friend and lead him to execution."

"Of course, there's other varieties of fun, too," said the blithe (once more) reincarnation of Bill. "When you shake down a friend and get all the money in his pocket—that's what we call giving him the merry 'ha! ha!' It's always a good joke whenever you trim a friend."

Mr. Slipaway went to his broker's office and was warmly greeted, but he didn't take any plunges; instead, he asked a check to "bearer" for his balance; just why he wanted it made out that way he could hardly explain to himself. The amount was considerable; once, it would have quite frightened him; now he regarded the little scrap of paper nonchalantly. It didn't seem very much to him, possibly because he knew he had acquired the money-

making habit which, being a very bad habit, no doubt, is not easy to be gotten rid of. At the moment he was thinking what a stunning dress he could buy for Mrs. Slipaway, if he wanted to—that is, if he could see his way to doing so with consistent grace. But he couldn't; it wouldn't be proper for Bill Carter to purchase elaborate wearing apparel for the charming Mrs. Slipaway.

That afternoon, passing a milliner's shop, he stood and gazed at sundry amazing creations. Here was another deprivation; what was the use of all this money if he couldn't go in and pick out the most smashing one in the bunch and toss it her way? Very exasperating situation, he told himself! Scandal to buy hats for his own wife? Positively ridiculous! Positively, he repeated, disgustedly. Ah, and there were some furs! Wonderful furs! At least, how wonderful they would look on a person who could wear them to advantage, and the rejuvenated Mrs. Slipaway was that kind of person. The costliest furs weren't any too good for her. No man need be ashamed of her, in the most select company; why, Mr. Slipaway wouldn't have been afraid to introduce her to a duchess.

From furs to diamonds was but a step, and Mr. Slipaway could hardly resist the temptation of pur-

chasing a nice big brooch, or a ring or two. But he had to smother the inclination. Too confounded bad, he thought to himself. She ought to be "ornamented up a bit"; when a woman can rejuvenate herself that far all by her own efforts, it's her due—her just due—that some one who takes an interest in her should be permitted to help her along in the beautifying process with a few extraneous gee-gaws. Mr. Slipaway felt as if he were being cheated out of something.

And there, too, were those motor-cars! A fine woman ought to have a car. Huh! Wasn't she being cheated out of something if she didn't have one? It certainly wasn't right; there was something rotten in Denmark, when Mrs. Slipaway was being deprived of—say—a nice, jaunty little town-car, in which she, and the furs and the big hat, etc., etc., would look very well indeed. By this time Horatio was becoming a regular cynic; money brought no pleasure; it was only a nuisance and an aggravation. It reminded you of so much you wanted to do, and you couldn't.

He returned to his lonesome apartments, gloomy and downcast; there wasn't a single little joy-bug in a glass of Martini; even the quaint Saki had lost some of his charm to interest him. He listened

moodily to the encyclopedic dissertation on "Fun"; it seemed Saki was painstakingly tracing the topic to its most hidden sources, at the library, extracting therefrom much curious lore appertaining to the causes of the risibilities of the different peoples and tribes who, more or less amusingly, inhabit this globe; and Saki had found that what was very funny to some people was just the opposite to others; and he was going to trace why this was so, later on, if there existed wisdom enough to tell him. He had embarked upon a nice little essay about what cannibals found most amusing to laugh at, tracing an analogy between cannibalistic fun with the protesting missionary and the pot, to the American idea, bounded by the irresistible desire to arrest "friend and lead him to execution," when the telephone rang.

Saki went to the instrument; it was a summons for Mr. William Carter. The latter went to the phone. He had been gloomily thinking of *her*, and now he heard her own voice. It gave him quite a start.

Would Horatio's old friend, Mr. Carter, honor them by dropping in for supper, to-morrow night? A simple little repast; maybe the minister would be there. They had enjoyed Mr. Carter's last call so

much a repetition of the pleasure would, the lady said, be much appreciated. Mr. Carter promptly said he would come; he spoke on impulse. He asked the lady how she was and several other personal questions, and she told him how very well she was feeling, at which the gentleman expressed his great gratification. Then Mr. Carter, after a rather lingering good-by, hung up the phone. He didn't ask himself at the moment whether he was doing wisely. In fact, he didn't care. He didn't know what he was going to do, or what might happen. He was in a strangely reckless and dare-devil mood.

"Mr. William Carter," said Horatio to the maid at the front door of his own home, the next day, at the proper hour, and entering, was greeted by a rather disconcerting company. The little sitting-room, moreover, had undergone a change. There was a piece of furniture in the center that looked like an operating table. Near it stood a small professional-looking man, and beside him another man of rather powerful build. The minister sat in a corner.

"This is the patient, doctor," said Mrs. Slipaway with a wave of her hand toward Horatio.

"Patient?" said that gentleman, with a start. "I—I came to supper."

"Oh, no, you didn't, Horatio dear; you came for something else," said Mrs. Slipaway.

"Who—who you calling Horatio?" said that gentleman weakly.

"Isn't that your name?" said the little professional man.

"None of your—business," said Horatio hoarsely. "I don't know you, and I don't want to know you."

"Perhaps we'll get better acquainted presently."

"Not if I have anything to say about it," observed Horatio testily. He now noticed the large man had moved over between him and the door.

And then they began to talk about operations. Mr. Slipaway sat down and eyed them warily. Mrs. Slipaway talked about him just as if he hadn't been there; she kept referring to him as the sufferer. The doctor took out a lot of instruments; Horatio did not like the looks of them; the little man had somewhat of a ferocious appearance he thought. Was it just another frame-up? Horatio rocked back and forth nervously in the big chair in which he was seated. He frankly didn't like the looks of things. Of course, it must be a frame-up, but the

question was how far would they proceed? There was an expression of determination in Mrs. Slipaway's eyes he didn't relish.

"Go as far as you like, Doctor," that lady said. "Only my dear Horatio must be restored to me."

"That, madam, is as it will be. I have told you the operation is a dangerous one."

"Operation?" said Horatio.

"A very pronounced depression," said the medical man, reaching over and passing his fingers around Horatio's head. "It will be necessary to bore through the bone, then follow the duct channel, skirting the edge of the brain. As I say, the operation is dangerous, but if it is successful the patient will recover his sense of personal identity, and that queer delusion of which you speak will vanish into thin air."

"Better he should die on the operating-table," said Mrs. Slipaway with a determined look, "than be running around thinking he is somebody else."

"Then, madam, I'll do my best," said the doctor.

"Hanged if you will!" said Horatio. "I've got something to say about that."

"No, you haven't," he observed with a smile.

"It's for your good, Horatio," said Mrs. Slipaway.

"Yes; he makes a specialty of boring into the damaged heads of poor sufferers and restoring them to their normal selves," said the minister, folding his hands. "And many of the sufferers have lived to bless him."

"You see, Horatio, you've just been taking a little mental outing, but now vacation-time is over," said Mrs. Slipaway soothingly. "Or it will be, when he has finished with you."

"Not finished with," said Horatio, endeavoring to be jocular. "You mean, finished me!"

"I trust not," she said. "We'll hope for the best."

"This may be my lucky day," said the doctor.

"Do you have unlucky ones?" said the patient.

"We all do, my friend," gravely. "We never can tell when we are going to grope through pathological darkness—in a word, what we are going to be 'up against!' The path of surgical exploration leads often to strange and insurmountable obstacles. The human brain is a very delicate thing. One little slip of the knife, and—"

"Maybe we'd better open with prayer," said Horatio, trying to look upon the affair as a joke. "We have a minister here."

"It is no jesting matter, sir," said the doctor gravely. "We have to cure you of a strange

hallucination. We have come to bury Mr. William Carter."

"I don't think you're a doctor at all," said Mr. Slipaway.

"I trust, when I am done with you, that remark will be retracted by you," observed the other pleasantly.

"Do you think such a statement—well, tactful, under the circumstances?" asked the minister. "In a few moments you will be lying here, under the influence of chloroform, and this gentleman, with a knife and other instrument, will be performing incisions in your head."

"You mean, I ought to make him feel nice and good before he starts? Well, I won't."

"A very obstinate patient," said the doctor. "The operation may be more difficult than I anticipated."

"Oh, Horatio, don't make it harder," pleaded Mrs. Slipaway.

"My name's William, and I came here to have supper."

"Lock the door," said the doctor to the assistant. "I trust the patient will not resist."

"I'd like to punch—" began the patient.

"Horatio—don't—" exclaimed Mrs. Slipaway. "Please don't—make him angry."

"I will be patient," said the little man, feeling the edge of a sharp instrument with his thumb.

In spite of himself, Mr. Slipaway shivered.

"Looks like a butcher to me!" he said, glaring.

The doctor smiled icily. "Remember he is not accountable for his words," observed Mrs. Slipaway.

"He will be more accountable *afterward*, madam," said the surgeon very coldly. "I promise to be very *thorough*. I will leave no stone unturned, to get at the root of the trouble."

Mr. Slipaway moved uneasily; likewise, he looked at the doctor more closely; no, he wasn't Mr. Treadway, that famous impersonator who had imposed so outrageously on him (Slipaway) on that other occasion. He was presumably some other impersonator, but even so, Mr. Slipaway little relished the idea of having chloroform administered to him by a novice. Why, they might give him too much, and that would be as bad as being carved up.

Or, was it possible Mrs. Slipaway did really think to restore him to his proper self by these heroic means? That good lady might well think his little hallucination real. The doctor, thought Mr. Slipaway, looked like a regular, bona fide "carver"; he looked as if he might go a long way in the interest of science. He might even indulge in a little experi-

menting on him (Mr. Slipaway) so as to get data for a paper for some medical convention. He might entitle said paper, "Hallucinations, Real or Simulated." He regarded Horatio with a cold calm eye that betokened an uncanny interest.

Mr. Slipaway began to think more rapidly; it was quite up to him to do something. How thwart that blood-thirsty little man? Pride forbade he should yield and confess himself openly an arrogant impostor! Mr. Slipaway, in his agitation, rocked faster and faster. Suddenly, amid the turmoil of his thoughts, a ray of light seemed to steal; at the same time he rocked so hard he went over backward with a bang. His head hit the floor; also his closed knuckles! Judging by the noise he must have received an awful bump. Indeed, for some moments, he lay perfectly still—quite unconscious, apparently.

"Is—is he dead?" said Mrs. Slipaway, looking really startled.

"I trust not," said the doctor, "for the sake of the operation! Perhaps if we lift him to the sofa—"

The doctor and the strong man did so. Mr. Slipaway opened his eyes. "Where am I?" he said. Then he looked around. "The same old room," he murmured, "but what's become of the mottoes?"

"They're gone, dear," said Mrs. Slipaway in her happiest tone.

"Gone," he repeated blankly. "And the old organ?"

"Gone, too," she murmured.

He looked at her. "But you're here," he said.

"Of course I am," she answered.

"My head hurts," he said. "I don't understand."

"Don't you?" said the doctor in a queer tone.

"You fell over, dear," said Mrs. Slipaway.

"Who are these people—that ugly little man and the big guy?"

"You never saw us before?" said the doctor.

"Don't know you from Adam," replied Horatio promptly. "What's that for?" pointing to the operating-table. "Is some one sick?"

"Some one was, my dear."

"Mr. William Carter," said the doctor.

"Carter?" said Mr. Slipaway, as if puzzled.

"You didn't know him?"

"Never heard of such a person," said Mr. Slipaway unblushingly.

"What did you say your name is?" said the doctor, putting out a hand as if seeking to get acquainted.

"Horatio Slipaway."

"What's that?" said the other as if a little deaf.

"The gentleman's a little hard of hearing," put in the minister.

"My name's Horatio Slipaway," said Mr. Slipaway, louder. Then he added: "And I don't give a—"

"Ahem," said the minister.

"—who knows it!"

"I say!" The voice was that of Johnnie Briggs, who some time later when shown into the room had found Mrs. Slipaway seated with Mr. Slipaway's arm thrown casually and compromisingly about her shapely waist.

"It's quite all right, Johnnie," she said, rising quickly.

"But—your—your promise?" stammered the dumfounded Mr. Briggs. "To—to—you know—after you—after—"

"What does the fellow mean?" said Mr. Slipaway haughtily.

"She—she said—" stammered Johnnie.

"I said I'd marry you, Johnnie, after I had a divorce from Horatio," spoke up the lady herself. "And I will," she added merrily. "Only, I'm afraid you'll have a very long time to wait—"

"You mean, you never meant to—to—"

"Isn't it the best joke?" said Mrs. Slipaway gaily.

"Aw!" said the disgusted Johnnie.

"Where's that club I hit him with last?" said Horatio.

"He isn't worth bothering with," said Mrs. Slipaway.

"Fade away!" said Horatio to Johnnie, and Johnnie obeyed.

"Of course, I knew you only wanted some good pretext to come back and buy me things," whispered the now thoroughly happy Mrs. Slipaway, when they were once more alone. "And it was awfully clever of you to fall over backward and bump your poor dear head again. I really felt you wouldn't force the issue."

"Did you? And what would you have done if I had?" said Mr. Slipaway accusingly.

"They'd have had to cut me up first before they touched you. I guess you knew that, and acted generous, just to spare my feelings."

"Maybe," said Mr. Slipaway enigmatically. "But how about that supper I came for? And what do you say if we dine out and have a real feast?"

"'Tickle-drops'?" she said coquettishly.

"I don't know just what that is," he answered demurely, "but if it's anything you want, just call for it."

"You're sure you're not going to get tired buying me lots and lots of things?"

"Never," said Horatio.

She gave a happy sigh. "I don't want things," she said. "Or—only one thing, really!"

"What's that?"

"And I don't have to want that, any more."

"Why not?"

"Because I've got it."

"Me, too!" said Horatio gruffly.

And then they sallied forth giddily.

"I don't know what's happened, or how it happened, but it's just happened," said Mrs. Slipaway.

"That's the way I feel," said Mr. Slipaway. "As—as if I could jump over the moon!"

"I guess that's—that's love," said Mrs. Slipaway timidly.

"Guess it is," said Horatio.

THE END











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